Word
Eater
83

WORDEATER 83 STAFF: Josh Dipert
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For a selection to be published in this issue, four of the above had to vote for acceptance.

AWARDS

Poetry--- $5.00 each
Chris Bernal
Josh Dipert
Jim Goebel
Mary Frances Lund
Rhonda Muir
Janine Passehl
Jennifer Stempien

Prose--- $5.00 each
Rita Bieniek
Sheryl Mastalesh
Chris Savini

Cover Designs--- $10.00 each

Front: Betsy Zacate

Back: Shellie Smith

Awards are given only to current JJC students. Selections by other JJC "family" are also sometimes printed.

SUBMISSION DEADLINES

Manuscripts and cover designs must be submitted to John Stobart, room C1069 by:
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Manuscripts should be typed and will not be returned.

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1. The Offer

Josh Dipert

Dear DAVID ERICKSON,

As you know, Riptide Records produces only the finest musical selections by the world's greatest groups. However, did you realize that every year, Riptide Records presents a selected group of music lovers such as yourself the opportunity to receive the most incredible deal known to man. Yes DAVID ERICKSON, now you too are part of this select group of listeners who may choose any two albums from the following list of top artists ABSOLUTELY FREE!* So it's your turn now, DAVID ERICKSON, to enjoy this fabulous value. Simply fill out the enclosed form and mail it in.

ALBUMS: Unwarranted: "Apple Turnover"
OLd DEf maN: "Thyroid Problem"
Bon Bon: "Nebraska"
Vanilla Extract: "Wonderbread"
Red Warm Dried Fruits: "Plasma Equal Love Tricks"

Name:______________________ Birthdate: __/__/__
Address:_________________________________ City:__________
Social Security Number:___-__-___ State:_______________
Race: _____Birthweight: ______Mother's Maiden Name: __________
Square Root of 1398765:__________ Height: _______IQ: ________
Weight in milligrams:______________ Visual acuity: _____________
Religious affiliations:____
Favorite vegetable from Sweden:__________________________________
Selections: ______________________________
____

*notethatthisofferexcludesallpeopleoflessthan50%HareKrishnaancest ryandallpeoplewhodonotliveinAlaskaorGardnerordonotownallofBarryMa nilow'salbumsorhaveanIQaboveseventyorcannotwhistle"YankeeDoodleDa ndy"whileclappingtheirhandsandspinningaroundwhilestandingontheirh eaddrinkingsomething.

2. Genesis of the "New Age"

Jim Goebel

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.

In the end man created civilization.

And the civilization was with a strange form. It was void and darkness penetrated the soul of man, and the spirit of antichrist moved upon the face of the planet. And man said, "Let there be light!" and there was a darkness. And man saw the darkness, that it looked like light, and declared "Yes! This is good for man!" and man divided the 'light' from 'darkness'. And man called the 'light' god, and the 'darkness' archaic religion. This was the first day.

The spirit of antichrist now stated "Let there be a division in the midst of the tribes of the earth, and let the followers of 'light' be called enlightened, and the followers of 'darkness' called enemies of progress. And man said "This is good!" The spirit of antichrist smiled. This was the second day.

The spirit of antichrist now said "Let the enlightened follow 'ascended masters' and their teachings, never questioning the motives, even if the masters require self-sacrifice. Let the enemies follow their archaic, intolerant God to their doom." Antichrist smiled. Man started to worry. This was the third day.

Antichrist induced man to say "Follow this wisdom: All enemies must die!" The followers of 'darkness' prayed to God to deliver them from the persecution imposed on them. God winced. Antichrist smiled. This was the fourth day.

Man declared "This is not good." Antichrist heard this and said, "For disagreeing with the 'masters' you shall all perish!" and proceeded to introduce plagues to all the nations, kindreds, and tongues of earth. 'Light' started to fade to its original form. This was the fifth day.

Man prayed "God! Help us!" God said, "You have not followed me but a deceiving spirit. If you want my help, you must believe and trust in me." God frowned, then took His followers out of this wicked world. Antichrist loosed all his fury upon the planet. This was the sixth day.

Everyone stood in front of a judge. Some being found innocent, others being sentenced to eternal fire for not believing and trusting in God. The innocent were sent to a glorious place where they would not have to worry about antichrist, war, death, or disease. The innocent were happy. God reigned. This was the seventh day.

In the end, God rescued man from his destructive ways.

3.Dust

Lynn Meredith

Home from the fields, careening the prairie lane,
On my schooldays' walk, my farm,
The cumbersome grain truck rollicks, white dusting
 days of autumn.
My mouth opened soundlessly funneling flakes of dust,
I sway, corn-high, on its elephant back,
Regal queen carried on kernels of gold.

Confetti corn dust swirls in figure-eights,
Catching in my eyelashes and snuffing up my nose hairs
As comfortably irritating as motor-scooting Shriners in
 a small town parade.
Unmasked I taste its choking dryness on my tongue and
 down my throat
My father beeps the meager horn in a knock-knock joke
To my mother waving from the window

Alone,inside, she dreams,
Dusting.

4. Still

Chris Bernal

The mosaic horses
lulling astral song
lost in the universal carousel

is heard tonight

felt

like a scent upwind

titillating the horizon

time divides nothing
each breath is slow for the new child
rising from the grasses and marsh
with utterance, he walks toward the lagoon

water of the soliloquy swamp
run like emerald dust
through the curious fingers

glowing dark
quiet and still

5. The lights from...

Kathy Jones

The lights from the street lamps glinted on the silver cross around my neck as we drove along underneath them. I was hunched down in the back seat, my hands shoved deep down in the pockets of my Chinos. The speaker blasted in my ears and the cold wind whipped through the back seat, chilling me inside as well as out. Elise had her window rolled down as she drove, letting the cold air just whip by her cheek and through her short blonde hair. I never really knew why she did that, but I supposed it was because she wanted to feel something besides the aching numbness that we all felt at that age; a numbness that made us run, recklessly, looking for a way out of the choking confusion. It was the same numbness that made her drink... but the alcohol only made it worse.

I pulled a hand from my pocket. My fingers were still very cold, and I was tempted to tell Elise to roll up her window but it actually felt good to me, too.

I ran my stiff fingers over the silver cross and the big black stone in the middle. Elise had given it to me, and I always wore it when I was with her. Maybe it was a symbol of our friendship, strong and supportive, but with a little blackness inside. That blackness was Elise's drinking... and now she was trying to pull me into it.

"Come on, Case," she'd say. "Get in touch with the dark side of the force." That was one of her favorite jokes. So was calling me "Case." My name was Casey, but she called me "Case" as in "Mental Case." Elise always found really unique ways to let me know she cared.

The car swerved a little, and I averted my eyes from the cross to the road up ahead of the car. Slowly, I drew my gaze back to Elise. Sure enough... the car had swerved because Elise was busy opening a bottle of rum. She poured some of it into a half empty can of Coke, rescrewed the cap, and then set the bottle back by her feet, under the seat.

"Here, Case... try some." She held up the can of Coke to me. "And why don't you sit up front? You always sit in the back."

"Because we're always on the way to pick someone up," I answered, taking the can of Coke from her this Friday night as I had so many Friday nights in the past; I took it to humor her.

I knew what it would taste like before I even put the can to my lips, but I took a sip anyway, making a face at the bitterness of the rum. It never went down easy for me.

"We're not picking anyone up tonight." Elise answered my statement, taking the can back from me. "Did it taste good?"

"You ask that question every week." I began to dig in my pockets for my driver's

license.

"I'm hoping the answer will change." Elise took a big gulp, smiling as she swallowed the alcoholic Coke. Sometimes I marveled at her skill.

"It won't," I told her determinedly, finding what I was looking for. "Listen, Elise... if you're going to drink, why don't you pull over and let me drive?"

****

As I looked straight ahead at the distant red taillights, I was surprised. I was surprised that Elise had actually pulled over and let me drive. She was usually so possessive of her red Monte Carlo, but she had relented and handed me the keys, deciding she'd enjoy the ride.

She was hunched down in the passenger seat now, sitting passively beside me. It had started to rain a little; a cold November drizzle that gave me an excuse to roll up the windows.

Elise was starting to buzz a little. I could tell it in the way she slowly, deliberately turned to me with her glassy blue-green eyes.

"Casey," she said, breathing out my name as if it took great effort. "Let's go to Jesse's house."

"No," I answered instantly, giving my reply as little thought as possible. I hated Jesse in a way that I had never hated anyone before. Jesse was Elise's "boyfriend." He was the one who'd gotten Elise hooked on alcohol. They'd also tried marijuana together, too. Jesse didn't score big popularity-wise with me. Come to think of it, he didn't score big with many people. It seemed to me that Elise was his only friend. I never hung out with Jesse... and I was starting to have second thoughts about hanging out with Elise even though I claimed she was my best friend.

"Yes, Casey." Elise reached over and pushed me. But she didn't do it playfully; she did it as if she meant it. "Jesse wants me to pick him up."

I shook my head, smiling sensibly, knowing it was a lie. Elise had this way of manipulating me, though, and I knew she'd try to use it. As I gripped the smooth, cold steering wheel more tightly, I resolved not to let her change my mind.

I ignored Elise's shoving.

"No, Elise. You know that Jesse and I don't get along. The night would be a total loss." I looked over at her as strands of my yellow hair fell over my eyes. I pushed them back, wanting to look Elise in the eyes.

"It already is. You're not having any fun." Elise held up the bottle of dark, honey-colored rum. "Take a sip, Case. Come on... it'll loosen you up," Elise urged, trying to pass the bottle to me. I easily resisted, nearly gagging on the smell as she waved it under my nose.

"No, Elise!" I resisted firmly, pushing her back. It was getting harder to drive and reason with Elise at the same time. I considered pulling over but decided against it. We were only a couple of miles from my neighborhood. I could stop at my house and get out of the car, letting Elise free to do whatever she wanted. It was better that way... she could go off to be with Jesse and leave me out of it.

"God, Casey... you are so anal retentive!!" This made Elise laugh, just hearing herself say it. I rolled my eyes and turned on the windshield wipers. The street lights had looked pretty through the little drops of rain, but it was getting harder and harder to see.

"Let's go to Jesse's," Elise insisted again. I held firm, my knuckles turning white on the steering wheel.

"No."

"Yes!" Her alcohol-laden breath floated around my face as she leaned over and gripped the wheel. "I'll steer. We're going to Jesse's..."

"No!" I raised my voice, jerking the wheel as I tried to stay in control. "Elise, I'm driving, and we are not going to Jesse's..."

"Yes we are!" Elise tried to push me

aside as she turned the wheel. I gasped as we nearly swerved out into oncoming traffic. I managed to pull us back into our own lane.

"Elise, stop it!" I yelled. "You'll get us killed. Let go of the wheel! I'm driving..."

"Pull over!" Elise suddenly commanded. She fell back into her seat, and as I looked over at her, I was actually afraid. She had a look of pure hatred in her usually-calm eyes. "Pull over!" she screamed, a loud piercing shout. "Pull over, dammit! This is my car... pull over now! Damn you, Casey..."

I did exactly what she wanted, frightened by her outburst. Elise had never, ever raised her voice like that before. I stared at her, wide-eyed, after putting the car in park. Cars whizzed past us as we sat there, staring each other down.

Elise's voice turned icy cold.

"Get out."

"Elise! It's raining. And you can't drive like this. You're drunk..."

"I'm fine!" Elise climbed over me and shoved me hard towards the passenger-side door. I slid over into the seat she'd just vacated. It was almost cold, like she'd never sat there at all.

"Elise. Please. Let me take you to my house..." I tried to reason with her to no avail. I knew she wouldn't listen, but I felt I had to try. I couldn't see letting Elise drive off in the condition she was in. I knew she'd end up hurting herself more than she already had.

"Get out!" Elise reached over and opened the car door for me. I could feel the rush of cold, rainy air against my cheek. It was so frigid and stinging... or maybe it was the way Elise was so roughly forcing me from her life. "Elise!" I decided to try to be tough with her. "You can't drive like this!"

"GET OUT!" Elise screamed again and gave me a shove. I tumbled backwards, catching myself just before I fell out of the car. Now I was really angry. I got out of her car, not saying a word. Although I was extremely upset, I knew somehow that it wasn't Elise talking. It was, as they say, the booze.

Elise gunned the engine and took off, squealing the tires. I stood in the soft, muddy and mushy grass, letting the rain pelt my face as I watched her taillights become harder and harder to see.

Without giving it much thought, I ripped the silver cross from my neck and threw it in the direction she'd gone. I heard it clink on the pavement and then, feeling satisfied with myself, I began to walk home. It was only about a mile away, and I knew the walk would give me a chance to think. Maybe I could try to figure out why I was Elise's friend.

I arrived home about a half an hour later. I was wet and chilled clear through. Taking the steps to my room two at a time, I artfully dodged my inquisitive parents and locked myself in my deep blue bedroom. I let my heavy, soaked jacket slide off my shoulders as I went to the radio and turned it on. If I didn't have noise and lots of it, I knew I'd go crazy with only my thoughts to entertain me.

"Casey...is that you?" my mom asked through the door. It's funny how parents ask that, especially mine, seeing as I'm an only child.

"Yes." I answered, peeling off my soaking wet Chinos.

"I didn't expect you home so early," Mom responded. I loved having these conversations through the door. "It's only nine."

"Uhm... Elise had something else to do," I replied non-committedly. "I decided to come home." I slipped into my pajamas and fell back into my four poster bed.

"Did she drop you off?"

"Yeah... you could say that." I stared up at my stark white ceiling. "Uhm, Mom... I'm really tired. I'm going to bed."

"Okay.. Goodnight." The floorboards

creaked as Mom walked away. I lay in bed, staring at the ceiling and reviewing the events of the evening in my mind.

I couldn't shake the memory of the evil, hateful look on Elise's face when she'd told me to get out of the car. I rolled over and faced the wall, feeling tears sting my eyes. I hated Jesse even more for taking my best friend and turning her into someone I couldn't recognize, no matter how hard I tried.

6. Lies hide...

Jennifer K. Stempien

Lies hide me away
From the horrid truth which
Lies within myself.
My comfort lies
Within my self-fabricated lies.
For in believing my lies
I create my own truth.

7. Sunday Tea

Lynn Meredith

We sat there, you and I, drinking tea, in silence.
Sad strains of Mozart twinkled, then turned like a
Memory to sadness.
The white wisps of curtain strained the sun,
April shadows stretched over the stillness of Sunday.
Smokey haze of a thought long ago hung in the air.

The candle patiently puffed its steady stream straight
into the air above us.
Then as if by signal the flame extinguished like a life.
The smoke above at first confused, the drift uncertain.
Its course realized, slowly and deliberately the
filaments rose.
Spiraling, twirling in a lazy dance,
Ancient patterns, its journey upward,
Weaving cells and stars, up and up,

Fading to nothing
No trace
No memory
No substance.

8. Tea for Two

Kathy Franke

A man resembling what the media markets as a mountain man complete with a long full beard and dandruff met me at the door and mumbled around a pipe, "What do you want?" I quickly explained my mission and sighed as he shrugged and waddled back to his perch in front of the screaming television. I ventured inside and was greeted by the repulsive stench of human excrement and stale smoke combined with filthy cats and rotten food. It took awhile for my eyes to focus in the dark hotel room after being in the California sunlight. The sight before me was overwhelming.

I was standing on a narrow strip of floor that curved around to the back of the double bedroom and led to the bathroom. All the floor area surrounding me was covered with magazines and clothing for the most part. From my island amidst the waves of junk, I could see where the family had cooked their food. On one of the dressers was a skillet covered with baked-on pancake batter and what looked like cat hair. There were bottles and open packages of meat and cheese, an obvious contributor to the aroma.

Still rooted on my island, I shifted my focus to the television that disturbed the peace with hard core rock music blaring, and I was alarmed to see nude women frolicking on the screen. My host, an obvious porno junkie, sat on a small section of the unmade bed enthralled as his desires were lived out in front of him on the screen. He must have felt my glare because he grunted, "Her mom ain't...," pausing as his attention was demanded by the picture in front of him, but he soon managed to gather enough concentration to sweep his hand across the room, which seemed to cut the thick atmosphere, and finished his phrase, "here,

but she's back there."

I peered into the back of the dark room and wondered if it was possible for any living thing to exist back there. A disease-infected cat rubbed against my leg as if to answer my question, and I began to itch. I felt as though I was suffocating in this black hole and wanted to escape to breathe fresh air again, but I had a job to do so I began my journey on the cleared path to the bathroom. As I moved closer to the back of the room, I began to panic as my imagination overtook all my senses and fear enveloped my being. My mind ran wildly, "Maybe she wasn't here at all and that ape of a man wanted me to move further into the room so that I wouldn't be able to run out the door when he trapped me back here and began to..." My paranoia was interrupted by a small voice asking, "One lump or two?" I wheeled toward the noise, responding half in fear and surprise and the other relief. Pure pity flung itself into my heart at the sight of a four or five year old girl sitting amidst the junk in a small area that she had attempted to clear for herself. She had addressed her question to a bald stuffed teddy bear and had a cracked plastic tea pot in one hand and the other hand held a coffee mug that had the words "THE WORLD'S GREATEST MOM" printed on it. Her long dark hair was ratted and tangled to the extent that it hung in the shape of a pony tail down her back even though there was no band to hold it tied.

I said her name quietly and she jerked around to face me. Her eyes were wide with fear, and she dropped her mug and tea pot to snatch up her teddy bear in a tight embrace.

"I didn't mean to take him. He was lonely," she said quickly and scrambled into the corner of junk to hide. I climbed through the sea of dirt and clothes to reach her and knelt besided her hiding place. I told her my name and explained that I was not there to take her teddy bear away. I assumed from her reaction that she had stolen the bear and from the looks of the bear probably from someone's garbage.

"Then why are you here?" she asked defensively, as if she was trying to catch me in a lie. I smiled and told her I was there to take her away. That I was going to take her to a new home where there would be lots of bears for her to play with and even a brand-new tea set so that she could have tea parties all the time.

Fear surfaced again and her dark eyes welled with tears as she challenged me, "I have tea parties now whenever I want!" I asked her if she had anywhere to sleep and as a last attempt promised that she could watch whatever she wanted to on T.V. But neither of those things were encouraging to her, and she began to cry and scream at me, "NO NO No no..."

The tears left clean streaks on her dirty face and I reached out to affectionately wipe a tear from her cheek. She pulled away from my hand and jumped to her feet. She darted past me and jumped through the junk until she was back on the path. She ran for the man still sitting on the bed oblivious to anything going on in the room. She attempted to climb up onto his lap for protection, but he threw her to the floor and abusively yelled at her for "messing with him" and told her to "shut-up" as her small voice pierced the air above the noise of the television. In her last desperate attempt to get his attention, she flung herself in front of the T.V. Instead of the protection she hoped to receive from him, in one motion the man back-handed her out of his view of the naked women as obscenities flooded out of his mouth. I ran to the screaming child, demanding that he leave her alone, but my voice was drowned out.

Quickly I wrapped my arms around the child and lifted her. I wiped some of the blood off her face with my sleeve and could no longer hold back my own tears. I began to cry, partly because it was my job to take her from all she knew and because... this was all she knew.

9. Heartsickening

Sean T. Clark

"Why did you leave me like that? Why did you leave me like that? Why did you leave me like that?" A little three year old girl, no bigger or heavier than a cocker spaniel, screamed over and over again in a voice full of all the anguish her tiny frame could muster. You could feel her pain. I wanted to rip the pain from her, ball it up, and throw it out of earshot. "Why did you leave me like that?" she shrieked. "Because you aren't listening to me," replied her mother. I felt my stomach constrict. At once drawn to and repelled by the little girl's pain, I looked on. "Why did you leave me like that?" "Stop throwing this tantrum." "Why did you leave me like that?" "I'll do it again if you don't stop." "Why did you leave me like that?" More pain than any child should experience in a lifetime was pouring from this child's taut, impassioned throat. She threw her small pink teddy bear at her mother. Like her impassioned plea, it too missed its target and fell to the ground. Suddenly I saw this child's life laid out before her; the cycle of mental abuse - anguish - reconciliation - repeat, again and again. "Put your shoes on," her mother said firmly. As they rounded a bend, I heard the little girl's voice echo through the stairwell, "Why did you leave me like that?" I know there is force gone wrong.

10. Lessons From a Child

Rhonda Muir

I tread softly into the sweetness
of a child's dream world.
She sits there so quietly,
talking, murmuring to her dolls,
pretending to read her books.

Her softly waving,light brown hair,
silken to my touch, draws me to her.
This child, birthed from my womb,
enchants me with her unquestioning
love and faith - in me.

She has seen me now, and comes
running with outstretched arms.
The impact of her secure knowing,
her absolute trust, contracts my heart
and I swoop her up in a whirling embrace.

Love such as this -
undeserved
unquestioning.
This child has, without sermon or lecture,
taught me, caused me to grow, and to ask -

Father, God, is this the love You have for me?
The fascination I feel for her - is this how
You delight in me? The love and confidence
she has in me - is this what You want in return?

11. Tales From the Crib

Agnes Waszkiewicz

Creature from the Crib Dimension Wailing.
Screaming.
Lots of Tension!
Dirty diapers
Kool-aid™ spills
My nerves are stretchin'
Then you smile and hug me tight
My nerves relax, my heart is light!

12.Emerald Isle,North Carolina

Margaret Carroll Redmond

The mother sea turtle
Will never know if they made it.

Never know if the lure
Of the condominium lights
Confused her baby hatchlings
Away from the moonlight
Flooding on the night waves.

For when her tractor tracks
Vanish from the erasable sand,
Only the secret eggs remain,
Throbbing under the wet sand.

Inspiration: "I remember the night this poem was born so clearly. All week we had the feeling of `Sea Turtles; Yes!' Three of us had just finished an intensive writing class at UVA, `The Virginia Writing Project.' We had come to the beach to unwind.

Erin stopped to draw on the pier. She couldn't resist sketching a flounder in a cooler and a little boy fishing.

I stopped, sat down on the pier, opened my journal and began to write. It was art^2 — me writing aboout an artist drawing. Children gathered around watching Erin sketch— the flounder emerging in black and white was striking! A little boy looked at me.

'Are you an artist, too?' he asked.

`No,' I said, `I am a writer.'

There— I had said it. Maybe now it was true!

That night it was the full moon and we walked on the beach. We rounded the turn from sand path to full-blown beach and I said,

`Erin, I have this feeling about turtles, like we will see them. Tonight.'

'Peggy!' she said. `Stop! You're stepping on it!'

I was suddenly aware of a huge force moving like a wind. I took a step backward and whispered, `It's the mother sea turtle.'

We tried to be unobtrusive. We backed up and watched, silent as sand, as the giant sea turtle covered her eggs. It was a force, a freight-train of flapping arms. I will never forget it." mcr

13. Grand Canyon Sweet

Jim Goebel

Listening to the peace you wrote,
Reminding me of the place
You painted with
 Violins,
 Timpani,
 Cymbals,
 Flutes,
 Tubas.
Bringing forth images
 Sunrise
 Painted Desert
 On the Trail Sunset
 Cloudburst
Of a many colored place
Etched into Arizona.

Thank you Mr. Grofe,
For capturing the Grand Canyon
Like no camera ever could.

Dedicated to Ferde Grofe (1892-1972), composer of the "Grand Canyon Suite."

14. Native America

Janine Passehl

last whispers of
moonlight glow
as night creeps
toward dawn
flames
flicker
and
dance
against a
forest backdrop
of pine
while
tendrils of smoke
form shapes that
take flight
and rise toward the
heavens
the shaman chants
speaking
infinite wisdom
of nature and
its glories
in communion
with the earth
this vast panorama
of beauty
and wonder
celebrating
a yesterday
forgotten and
buried
by the
assassination
of a
dream.

15. Another Modern Fable: Eric the Great or How to Screw Up the Human Cannonball

Josh Dipert

The crow began to howl and cheer
as Eric walked their way.
All with thoughts of the soon to come spectacle
on that fateful day.
The sun shone brightly
and the wind was not there
to sweep his dreams away.
Eric had developed a plan
from an impulse, stray.
For he intended to fire himself
out of a cannon someday.
He told his mama this at six,
then seven, and eight, and nine.
All the while, not suspecting,
poor mama would simply say "Fine."
Not till 26 did Eric have the guts
to bring his old dream into life.
He sold off his home, his dog, his car,
and finally his wife
To purchase a giant cannon
of expensive silver and steel,
and find himself a teacher,
The famed Jose D'Vil.
The day arrived,
his lessons learned,
Eric demanded a show.
And finally, through many pleas, he got himself a "Go!"
Then the moment arrived
for Eric to take flight,
hopefully the landing would be
very, very, light.
Eric waved gladly at the crowd,
and slid into the hole.
The cannon starts to point upward,
x with a quick drum roll.
The countdown starts, the crowd, it gasped,
as Eric faced his fate.
And even his old sold-off wife,
cast off all her hate.
The cannon boomed,
a noise as loud as you could get,
flying out poor Eric saw
that he forgot his net.
Eric now began to pray
hoping it's not too late,
and quickly discovers that no man ever avoids his fate..
MORAL: Look before you leap.

16. For Those Far

Chris Bernal

Hunger

Hunger and spite
spice
a feast of emotions
caldons of myriad senses
prepare
for the light
and the day
for the night
which arrives
in a creepy
kind of way

Hunger

Hunger and might
right
a thousand deaths

Mechanical features
in nights shadow
shown in separated watchings
viewings
of a slow-motion camera

17. Confessions of a Doormat

Kathy Jones

Every time you use me
For a doormat
Your shoes seem dirtier
Than
The last time.
My message has changed
From "Welcome"
To "Have a Nice Day"
As I hope that each time
You wipe your feet
Will be the last time
You use me.
I could get up
Off the floor
And simply walk away
But all doormats
Know how to do
Is
Lay on the floor
And look
Stupid...
And feel
Even worse.
So next time you use me
To wipe
Your feet...
Please don't wear boots -
They hurt.

18. Confessions of a Doormat, Part 2

Kathy Jones

You wore your boots today
And I was Hurt
I think it was
Intentional
Even after I asked you
Not to.
What's next?
Will you show up tomorrow
In baseball cleats
Caked with mud
And very
Very sharp?
You told me to tell you
When you hurt me
But it happens so often
You don't listen to me
Anymore.
But you probably just can't
Hear me...
You're so far up there
And I'm way down
Low
On the floor
Chanting
"Have a nice day" and
Waiting
For the cleats.

19. He Says

Rhonda Muir

He says,
I want to grow old with you,
but I don't want to feel trapped.
I want to grow old with him,
but I will be trapped.

So what is the reason,
the need, to be together?
To be together —
when we have grown old?

Maybe we should wait until we're
nearing "old age", and check again-
maybe by then we'd rather not
be "old" together!

Why be "trapped" at all?
Let's just remain free now
and let tomorrow - and its "old age"
worry about itself.

Comfort.
Security.
Finances.
Nope - not good enough -
I think I will remain "untrapped"
myself!

20. The Cage

Mark Moore

Of walls there were six,
and all made of glass,
Dark and Black they were,
through which light but dimly did
pass.

This Cube of my dreams,
this Prison of my fears,
This sadness I have known,
On my journey through the years.

Though of Shadows and Wraiths
this fortress I did make,
And it be insubstantial as mist,
Yet through it I could not break.

But for the vision of One,
who somehow saw through,
And managed to do for me
what I alone could not do.

21. Cage

Jim Goebel

Open the cage of your mind
And let ideas fly,
Climbing high above
the chasm
of wasted time.
And when they return
Leave the cage open
so they can
fly again.

22. Oh Well's "1997"

Sheryl Mastalesh

Myra stood gazing into the nursery window. She knew that she was very lucky to be here looking at her new grandchild. She thought that she would never have any grandchildren. She wondered what his world would be like. So many things had changed over the last five years alone.

Bill Clinton was elected to the presidency in 1992. No one would have ever thought that he would have been assassinated. They never did catch the assassin. Rumors were spread that it was a teamster man who was not happy that Clinton was elected anyway. Some suspected a gay rights member who thought that the president did not hold his oath to them regarding their rights in the military. Others thought that it may have been someone that was disappointed that the unemployment situation did not improve as he had proposed. Another embarrassment for the United States.

The nurse brought the baby closer to the window. Myra was so glad that he was so healthy. She thought about all of the children who had starved in Somalia in 1992. By 1993 fighting, starvation, disease, and drought had wiped out most of Africa. The rapid spread of AIDS and AIDS-related strains that had eliminated so much of the population of the world had literally erased the African community.

Myra kept watching the pink-faced little bundle. No one would have thought that a world that was worried about overpopulation and taught birth control and allowed abortion would be rewarding citizens for each child born now. By the time that they discovered a cure for AIDS it had done so much damage. Cremation became a law. Cemeteries were now just little banks for the mini-capsules that were allowed to be kept for the remains. For some reason, Myra's family was untouched by this disease. And now, this miracle of a baby that she was so thankful for. Cancer had run in her family line but they had found the cure for that in 1994.

The nurse came over to change the baby. Not everyone was as lucky as her daughter to conceive a child. She thought about the poor women who had

unknowingly been fertilized by donor sperm that had carried the deadly AIDS virus and had added to the spread of that killer. No one underwent any type of surgery during those bad years unless it was an extreme emergency. Too many health professionals had been infected and too much blood had been tainted. No one wanted to take a risk.

And then there was the sudden unexplained sterility of so many people. Some researchers blamed the strong ultra-violet rays of the sun, some pinpointed it back to the daily exposure to supposedly-harmless microwaves from food, others believed it was a germ warfare spread by the Soviets. Certain religions believed that it was a curse sent down.

The baby was smiling in his sleep. She wondered if his dreams had to do with the future. Oh yes, those Soviets that everyone thought were backing off took advantage of the weakness of the nations and took control again of more countries. The continual catastrophies that had occurred in the early nineties were all part of their control of the weather by their satellites. This had eliminated so many lives from earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and other natural disasters that they empowered. So much of Los Angeles had vanished after the big earthquake in 1993. Finally, later that year our country became aware of their involvement and created blocking devices to counter their control.

At least this little one might not live through such terrible times. The prisons had been emptied quickly by the rampant rage of the AIDS spreading through the institutions. After so many people had been stricken with cancer and Alzheimers, the government released information that medical researchers had definitely attributed so much of this misery to the chemical additives in our foods. They also finalized the studies that verified the research started by Theron Randolph, the food allergy specialist from Illinois, many years before. People were tested regularly for food allergy reactions and many of the preservatives have been banned from our foods. Nutrasweet has been deleted due to its connection to Alzheimers as well as saccharine since it is carcinogenic. The relation to violence and other abnormal behavior has been linked to the diet of a person. There is very little crime now.

She wondered when they could take the infant home. The hospitals had become extra cautious with newborns now. They did not allow anyone in the hospital without being identified by the patient who viewed them on a monitor. The nursery was locked and the only time the mother saw the child was at feeding time. She was the only one allowed to touch the child other than the staff. In vitro fertilization had become so expensive that hardly anyone could afford to have it done. And those who were able to bear a child could sell the child for a large sum if they could part with the baby. This was legal. But there were so few available.

Maybe her grandson would grow up to be president someday. In 1992 they would have laughed if someone would have told them that Dan Quayle would be elected in 1996. Times sure have changed. Religion has become stronger in these times. The ideas of a future with rocket cars and space ships and dried food packets did not get past the comic books. Cars are small and run off of steam. This is a back-to-nature world now. Houses are smaller. Families are closer. Pollution, contamination, and waste are all strictly controlled. The air is easier to breathe. Myra let out a sigh. She was a lucky one.

23. The Buell Avenue Cocktail Party

Lynn Meredith

Onto the paved street I clop
A pony gait, a peasant-plumed
parading march, in harness proud.

My winter whites shaggy new,
my casserole coverless and unshamed,
Broccoli bistro crock I carry

To the Buell Avenue Cocktail Party.

Hopeless welcomes, burping Tupperware,
I sashay my top-less casserole past
The guests, whispering, fanning, faces set

Like Hummel figures poised in pairs.

They tip their lids to tempt my gaze
Teasing wafts seduce. Knowing eyes
Scan impressions made. They wait.

Like old whores holding out for more.

24. A Call to Reality

Kathy Franke

Chandeliers polished meticulously by stuffy maids
Butlers scurrying to serve
Eclairs filled with sickening sweet cream
Rose Taffeta dresses with Chantilly lace

Reality where are you?

Red and white checked table cloth spread on luscious green grass
Cold fried chicken with Nannie's special seasonings
The sun caressing bare, freckled shoulders
Shoes and socks abandoned with tan ankles exposed

Reality where are you?

A candle light's flicker reveals a forgotten table set for two
Silk robes discarded in a heap on hard wood floors
Sparkling wine and a box of cigarettes waiting patiently
Crackling fire casts larger than life shadows of united bodies on the wall

Reality where are you?

A family clinging to each other in their grief
A steel, grey casket cradling his cold body
"The nature he loved swallowed him" she said
No one's hug can reach the emptiness trapped inside

Reality, who called you?

25. Wealthy Widow

Lynn Meredith

A fine mesh of snow, not enough
To make things go away, just enough
To make my mind slow and breathe.

I'd make a wonderful wealthy widow,
Wouldn't I? Brewing my tea and watching
the snow go by, while I in my warmth
sigh and sing soft tunes to myself.

Tasting lemons and oranges from far away
Warmth, I'd have an orange each day
And salt, and sugar, and refrigerated meat.

I'd read novels by people long ago
Dead and play music by people
Whose vibrations faded eons ago.

My dogs would have treats most people
Love to eat - and toys
Many a child would be eager to see.
A dream to be so rich
So rich a whim is mine.

26. Default

Mary Frances Lund

He chose to be my
protector
provider
supporter
encourager
defender
lover
friend.

I didn't choose
to be
his
widow.

27. Nothing am I

Jennifer K. Stempien

Nothing am I
The lights go out
The contents spilled

Nothing am I
Going through the motions
Feeling the emptiness

Nothing am I

28. Sadness... and Light

Lynn Meredith

In its fading light, I see
The quiet death of a man
I loved.

In the mystery of his death, I see
the mystery of my own soul.

So many moments of my life wasted
So little listening to my voice within.

29. Deafening Silence

Mary Frances Lund

The world should stop
when someone dies.
By what right does it keep on
turning?
How can my heart continue to beat
when half of me is gone?
There is a silence
that no amount of noise can fill.

It echoes his name...

30. Seesaw

Lynn Meredith

When I was in first grade, I trusted everyone. So when out on the playground at recess my best friend's brother asked me if I wanted to go on the seesaw with him, I thought nothing of it. In fact I was thrilled. Mark Compton was one year older than Becky and I, and although he could be a bit devilish to us when I was over visiting the Compton's, he was nevertheless someone I knew and not one of those strange, new kids from town. He was a farm kid like me. And he was older. So, I hopped on my end of the long, green board, its paint peeling to weathered gray in the spot where everyone sat and its fulcrum cemented in the powdery brown dirt, bolted at its midpoint. What I didn't know on that bright spring day is that a seesaw is never truly balanced; it is simply in endless pursuit of a balance it can never achieve. A seesaw is the scales of justice by which Libras are doomed to tip from one extreme to the other in an attempt to find the elusive harmony they naturally crave. This sign, my sign, most appreciative of balance and harmony, is the sign that is never balanced. I was to learn my earliest lesson in this painful reality at 10 o'clock recess on the seesaw.

Negotiating a seesaw takes trust and cooperation between the parties. Both must agree to test the balance; it is not a unilateral business. I tentatively set my seat on the worn, smooth board with the balls of my tennis-shoes feet dug into the sand. My knees were bent against the weight I knew they must accept when we agree to let nature, harmony, and the forces of balance take over. If all goes well, we scooch and slide our respective rear ends to the place on our end of the board where balance will be achieved. If we differ much in weight, we must sit the heavier close in to the fulcrum, the lighter to the outer edge, sometimes sitting so far off the edge as to be hanging one dip away from a hideous crash. These are the simple facts: agreement, cooperation, respect, and trust. It was the way of the world in one simple childhood game, a system of physics and personal interaction played out without theory, without knowledge.

But even in second grade, a person like Mark Compton has to break nature's rules and find out what will happen if he doesn't cooperate. Just for the hell of it, what would happen if he lured somebody into the usual agreement and then arbitrarily broke it? His ego throbs for expression, the hell with commonality and respect. So he's insensitive? He's a second grade boy with a naive first grade girl on the other end. Maybe the temptation was just too strong for him. Whatever his dark motives, I boarded the seesaw in good faith, waiting to feel the balance I knew would magically occur, the chemistry destined to counter our respective weights, when BAM! down I went, hitting my bottom, not once when the board first hit the ground in a flash, but a second time when I bounced up off the ground and slammed back down to the board. Amazed, I looked to Mark, a boy and older. There he stood, both feet on the ground, but with straight legs, not soft, locked joints, not negotiating knees. There he stood, laughing, learing, and pointing at the humiliation he had caused. Tears stung my eyes from the smarting of my bottom and betrayal in my heart. He was older. He was my friend's brother. Our families were good friends. We were on foreign territory where familiars should stick together. He wasn't one of those other town kids. Who knows what they might do to me. He purposely let me think I was safe and then showed me I wasn't. It all seemd so evil, so mean-spirited. What's the humor in deliberately hurting someone who doesn't know any differently?

I haven't seen Mark for more years now than I knew him in school. I hear about him and his family from his mother from time to time. I wonder if he ever thinks of his cruelty. I never knew him in later years to be cruel. In fact, he seemed a nice, pleasant boy, quiet and shy. Today he's a successful farmer-businessman. I wonder how he explains that day so long ago to himself. I wonder if he justifies it by some adage that kids will do those things. I wonder if he feels as if it were someone else, some mean little boy that no longer exists. Most likely, the memory has gone the way of most childhood memories: stored, as if in a messy game closet, to be retrieved accidentally some day when the eye falls on a corner long hidden from view. In old age, before death, a mind may remember the cruel acts of a spirit learning to live.

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31. The Facade of Childhood Innocence

Chris Savini

I have my prejudices like everyone else. I admit that in the past I have discriminated against people for no good reason. One instance, however, stands out in my memory, a horrible black stain on my conscience.

This memory comes from my early childhood. In reality it isn't one specific memory but several memories blurred by time into one semi-coherent event in my mind. I was about five years old and saw the world through five-year-old eyes. To me the days lasted for months, a year was a lifetime, and everyone was the same. I still hadn't learned the difference between little boys and little girls, and a black kid was just another kid to play with. I treated everyone the same way except one person, a little girl named Jenna Noble. She was a perfectly adorable little darling of a girl who roamed the neighborhood for hours on her fire-engine-red tricycle. This is how I see her now through my nineteen-year-old eyes, but back then she was a freak. I don't whether it was the result of an accident or a birth defect, but Jenna's left arm ended at the elbow.

At times I would be overly nice to Jenna and other times I would be unbelievably cruel. What determined my mood remains a mystery, but no matter how I was acting at the time the sight of her filled me with fear. I was afraid of her absent arm, afraid that she was contagious, or that she had done something awful which caused her deformity. To a five year old her fake arm was quite threatening and looked more like a bizarre weapon than a limb.

Naturally all of my fear was irrational, but then there aren't a plentitude or rational pre-schoolers roaming the neighborhoods of Suburbia. I, along with my friends, reacted to the fear we felt in a way that would surprise most people who cling to the notion that children are pinnacles of beauty and innocence. I can remember calling to Jenna from across the street and offering her candy. When she came close enough my friends and I tossed the rocks we had concealed behind our backs. I don't recall ever hitting her, but the act of throwing was horrible enough to scar her worse than any rock could. Then there were the names I called her and the fact that I usually ran when she came near. These are images which torment my conscience to this very day.

Even with all the fear she inspired in me, I would still sit hidden in the bushes and watch her play. Her stub of an arm always seemed to cling to everything she touched, and she used it as though there was nothing wrong with it. Her left arm seemed to have an almost supernatural quality to it, a ghost arm. I was fascinated by the very thing I feared most and that is what confuses me to this day.

Why was I was so to this girl who practically hypnotized me ? The thing that scared me away from her was what drew me to her. In my eyes she was imperfect, yet she was flawless in every other way. Aside from her handicap she was the ideal little girl with long curly blonde hair and clear blue eyes. But no matter how cute she was, I could never get past that left arm of hers.

I can remember thinking that her parents had taken her arm from her. Jenna's mother was a tall androgenous woman who wore her long black hair in a pony-tail and was always clad in a cowboy hat and boots. I rarely saw her father, but I remember him being a large man. For some reason I thought they had abused Jenna and taken her arm at a poker game. I pictured her parents pushing her forearm into her shoulder and tying it up like a balloon. These thoughts seem ridiculous to me now, but back then they made perfect sense.

Even with the fascination I had with her and the pity I felt for her, I still tormented her. And expressing the shame I feel now for what I did to that girl is not possible. I wish I could find Jenna Noble and apologize to her, tell her how I have changed and try to express the extreme remorse I feel for putting her through that pain. I can't go back and stop my five year old self from being such a complete monster though I wish I could. How ever, if it were possible, I would probably be sickened to see the ability that a five year old has to hurt another human being.

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32. Employment

Don Schuldt

Grey, brown fuzzy carpet at my feet below,
nervously sitting on an uncomfortable bench
reading rerun magazines.

Then the appointment hour dawns near
I notice not, my constant nail biting,
I glance at the rapidly oncoming hour.

To slowly stand up, and take the first step,
is an agonizing eternity in itself.
Now reaching towards a piece of gold, on a fram
My goal is the large desk, at the end of the hall,
the hall that smells like a new carpet.
Then suddenly, I'm there, at the door, knocking.

I am allowed entry to the forbidden lair,
well knowing of the grotesque monster inside,
I take a last breath of fresh air, and enter.

Ignoring the upset feeling of my stomach,
I slowly look up. Past the carpet, past the desk,
into a warm, smiling, friendly face.

I then take a deep sigh of relief,
now knowing that the monster behind the desk,
is only a mere mortal like myself.

33. HE LIES

Martha Sayles

Sometimes I find him upside down
Paws in the air, head askew
His tender belly very in view
So white, so fluffy, so like a clown
looks out of k er,

ilt
That's what I see as
HE LIES

Sometimes I find him out on the sill
Wrapped up in sunshine, gett'n some rays
Often he'll leave or often he stays
Waiting for me to open the door...I will;
when I can! And.............
That's what I see as
HE LIES

Sometimes I find him...Well, not at all.
I look in the south room on the bed,
I look in the west for his black little head.
Where has he gone? Down the hall?

Ah...! Under the table his whiskers so white!
That's what I see as
HE LIES

Sometimes I find a dead mouse at the door.
How did it get there? Well...really I know.
This hunter has stalked it and had it in tow.
A prize for his keepers.........Oh, GALORE!
He's my cat. That's where it's at as ...

HE LIES.

34. For Dogs and Diogenes

Shellie Smith

Wake up from your sunny, suburban slumber and take a look at the mortgage-farm-Norman-Rockwell nightmare that is America today. A land where Little Orphan Annie grows up to be a hooker and a heroin addict and Rin-tin-tin was put to sleep permanently last Sunday at the pound. A place where Superman is killed for money and Popeye gets discharged from the Navy because some joker in command thinks Olive is a transvestite.

People live and breathe, striving for something higher underneath the burden of knowing that this world's environment is a poisoned one. The economy is declining, politics are corrupt uselessness, and everyone is essentially stupid, dishonest, and selfish.

There are those who cease striving for their goals and become miserable, caught up in negative attitudes and masochist's games. They become complacent, self-styled slaves to the Corporation with nothing better to do than raise children and cast their failures and failed aspirations down on their offspring.

Then there are the fools who continue to struggle against the odds like so many trout swimming upriver. They believe people are too sane to truly want to Nuke each other off the face of the planet, dreams are possible, and problems can all be solved in time. For them, Earth is a worthwhile venture to contribute to for the sake of the next generation.

Thus, two paths exist on our journey towards death. Which, do you suppose, is the lie most responsible for perpetuating our species?

35. What Pain I Hold Is Mine

Steve Maielli

What pain I hold is mine
When time comes for it to go
it will grow and become something
else
and
perhaps
it
will become something sacred,
lonely
or beautiful,
but for now
what pain I hold is mine
and it is all I own.

36. Four Months

Tony McFadden

My arms hold no love,
My heart feels no passion,
deep inside a heart beats.
Blood flows, that carries pain.
Only in memory does tenderness and longing eyes exist
I hurt for the familiar
So close and running fast,
Please wait for me.

37. Four Months and a Day

Tony McFadden

I no longer can feel the meaning behind the words.
My whole mind is confused with questions.
I can only get part of it back only it's not the same.
It's more a memory than a map,
Where my thoughts used to guide me,
I am now only led to more complexities.

38. Observation

Chris Bernal

The observer
and the observee
make a silent kind of love
where the observer
is granted a dazed pleasure
by observing

39. If the libraries...

Sheryl Mastalesh

If the libraries were as busy as the video stores, maybe so many of them would not be closing and more kids would know how to read and spell.

40. A Small Advantage

Philip Antinori

The empress of the court sat regally centered on her throne due to her stately girth. She impressed those who glanced her way with shapely curves from the Victorian manner of her birth. Her demeanor was slightly tarnished for she had reached the middle ages, and as many who pass that center ground, had accepted her fate in stages. The year of 1949 was the high noon of her reign, and she offered shelter to her subjects and comforted them through their pleasures and their pain. As a gracious benefactor with secrets so sublime, the magnificent queen of 2545 72nd Court in Elmwood Park towered over her neighbors in the sunshine.

Accepting the rays of the sun on a fawning summer day, the light diffused around her curved glass windows in a most alluring way. The expansive veranda which encircled her in fond embrace was playing tag with bowing shadows in dignity and grace. Doves fluttered about her gables and a cupola worn as a crown which topped a siloesque tower that held curved rooms in the round. The parlor and the library were dressed in mahogany and parquet while these adornments proffered an aura of darkness even at midday. From the parlor, from the kitchen, and also from a dimly lit hallway inside the home, there were secret passageways and many doors from whence one could stealthily roam. All in all the mansion was quite regal that is clear, and a small coach house was modestly guarding at her rear.

Peering through dirty garage windows, one could see the vestiges of an old abandoned carriage while adjacent were two rooms where lived Philip and Rose, the childen of Duke and Esther's marriage. Between the empress and her pawn the shadows did hold sway where one would always find the children hard at play. On this day Philip, Rose, and the neighbor children were playing heartily as they examined fallen heart-shaped leaves from the large catalpa tree. Rose commandeered an old baby buggy to take her doll for a walk. All the little girls accompanied her with giggles and small talk. Later, Rose approached her brother and asked gingerly, "We all want you to be our real baby and ride in the buggy."

At first Philip protested, "I'm not a baby. I am four years old."

Rose retorted, "I'm six years old and you should listen to your older sister and do as you are told."

Philip said, "I'll do it because it looks like fun, not because of you." The girls took turns pushing the buggy and laughed when he would say, "Goo goo." From the balcony of the empress a figure did appear, it was Philip and Rose's cousin Gene, one relation who lived here. He enjoyed the sounds of the children playing in the breeze and always brought some gifts with a friendly tease. He waved to all in a manner quite profound for a teen, yet always cavalier was cousin Gene. As he came down the stairs, all the children's eye's gathered about with their stares. He walked right up to Philip with a great big frown, and then he pointed to a pile on the ground. "Did you do this poop? If you did, you better pick it up with a scoop," he said to Philip.

Philip replied, "I didn't do that. Maybe it was a dog?"

Gene said, "I saw you squatting like a frog." At this comment the children laughed quite a bit but all returned to silence when he went to lift it. He held the feculent mold which he declared was a rubber fake, and he offered it to hold, but no one would partake. Another of his practical jokes was played out this day, but all the children rejoiced when he gave them gifts of bright colored clay. The

remainder of the afternoon saw busy fingers molding as the children proudly displayed the creations they were holding.

Philip and Rose immediately dropped their forms of clay when their father drove up in his 1937 Chevrolet. With only a front bench seat, it was a two door raven black business coupe, and the rear design of the trunk fell with a swoop. It was complemented on both sides with a running board, and Philip and Rose in greeting their father climbed aboard. Their father exclaimed, "I'm real glad to see you guys, and tonight we'll have a big surprise."

Rose guessed, "It's a Hershey chocolate bar and ball jacks!"

Philip proposed, "No, it's a toy car and some Cracker Jacks!"

"I suppose you both will have to wait. Let's go have supper; it's getting late," replied Father. Inside the small house they found their mother holding a small dish while father bent slightly and gave her a big kiss.

She softly spoke, "Hurry now children, go wash your hands and face. Supper is ready and it's time for us to say grace." Before they all ate supper, they all sat down to pray and after all was devoured, mother washed and dried the dishes and put them all away. Meanwhile, father sat in an easy chair while loosening his shirt cuffs. He then lit an old cigar and began to make short puffs. The billows of smoke arose as the children coughed, but their eyes beamed brightly as he gently blew halos of smoke aloft. Mild discomfort in breathing was quite a small price to pay for the grandeur of viewing the rings of smoke in heavenly array. After listening to the evening news on the Zenith radio, father then announced, "It's time for us to go." He added, "We have to travel several miles to pickup my paycheck in Niles."

The children were excited about riding in the car with the coming nightfall, they could follow the brightest star. With father behind the wheel and Rose sitting at his side, Philip sat on his mother's lap as they began their ride. Not long into their journey, the car violently shook while father mumbled under his breath and said, "I'll stop and take a look."

Philip asked, "May I come and help you?"

Father answered, "You won't be much help, but you can watch what I do." On his tiptoes little Philip stood while his father lifted the right side of the hood. From Philip's view he saw a clear glass bubble containing some golden elixer. His father tapped on the glass and said, "That ought to fix her."

Back inside the car, mother asked, "What was out of kilter?"

Father replied, "I'm going to have to clean that damn fuel filter."

Upon resumption of their journey with more smoothness than before, they arrived at their destination of the local Niles drug store. To the children, the store was a feast before their eyes with many shapes and colors in every shape and size. Shortly, Philip and Rose could be found sitting on the soda fountain stools and spinning round and round. The soda fountain was black and smooth as silk, and their father went behind the counter and made them malted milk. The old man, who was owner of the store, gave the children an approving look and told them both to go and pick out a comic book. The books were gifts the old man did insist, and he proceeded to give a paycheck to father for his work as a pharmacist. With their business concluded, it was time to go back home, and mother was found purchasing a hair net and a comb.

The gathering darkness had induced the slight appearance of the moon while the children gazed with sleepy eyes as they knew they would be home soon. The return trip home went by without a hitch, but upon their arrival there was a small glitch. Mother

calmly related with a sad looking pout, "I've forgotten my keys. I'm afraid we're locked out."

Father said, "The only way we can get in is the small round window overhead. The one that is placed well above the bed." He added, "The opening is only about as wide as my head. We'll have to let one of the children in to land upon the bed." He pulled the car around by the window and stood on a running board. He then mightily lifted Rose into the heights she soared. He pulled her back out for it was as he feared. It seems that sister Rose was slightly larger than she appeared. He turned to little Philip and asked, "I need your help, little man. If you are up to the task, climb through the window if you can fit."

"I can do it!" he said bravely. He was lifted up and put through the opening which resembled the number zero. He fell onto the bed with a thump and had visions of being a hero. Inside the house it was darker than he thought and through menacing shadows he fought. Waiting outside the front door were mother, father, and sister Rose, Philip had to reach and turn a knob on his tiptoes. "The knob will not turn," he said with a cry.

Father calmly said, "I pushed the door slightly. Give it another try."

This time the knob slowly turned and Philip sighed, "I was afraid it wouldn't open. I almost cried." His mother gave him a hug and a kiss. His sister just sneered with a hiss.

Father said, "I'm proud that you've done this."

Kneeling at his bed to pray, Philip asked God for another exciting day like today. While a sliver of the moon was peeking through the bedroom curtain, Philip reminisced about the events of a day he would always remember for certain.

41. Long Wait in Line

Laurie Montgomery

This tight collar is itching my skin
I have to go potty
I want a drink
I don't want to sit on the fat man's lap
At once I am thrust upon his red velvet pants
I want to cry, but grin
My bodily functions are relieved
Merry Christmas Santie Claus!

42. All for Fun

Sheryl Mastalesh

Rerun your childlike ways by spending a winter's day with a little one. Let the snowflakes dance on your face and try to catch them on your tongue. Harvest an icicle sword from a roof's edge for a duel or initial the snow angel that you make from your form as you flap cares away with your wings. Be the ruler of your own fort as you protect yourself from inevitable white cannon balls. Sculpt yourself a Michaelangelo snowman.

But remember, this time melts away as quickly as the sun shrinks away the snow. And savor the warmth in your heart as you will the hot chocolate and heat of the house that revives your frozen body.

43. December Day

Rita Bieniek

It was a beautiful sunny December day and Carol's disposition was as bright as the white blanket covering her lawn. Carol was in an especially good mood today. The brief squall that passed through the area the night before had deposited its ritual Christmas offering at her door. "It's beginning to look alot like Christmas," she began to sing as she prepared the children's breakfast.

Carol went into the living room to call her kids to the table and stopped to admire the twinkling, glittering tree that stood in front of the picture window facing the front yard. Carol was surprised when Jim, her husband, agreed to setting the Christmas tree up earlier than usual. Jim usually insisted that the tree go up no earlier than two weeks before Christmas Day, and he generally got his way.

This Christmas seemed special to Carol. It was the first year since she and Jim had married that they could afford gifts. This year during the tree trimming there were no fights, arguments, or even bad words spoken. The children were all well, and it was the first year that she wouldn't have to worry about her mother visiting.

Carol's children, Robin, Randy, and Mike, were dreaming aloud about the presents they were hoping to get soon. They finished their meal and deposited their dishes into the sink. The children got dressed, brushed their teeth, and dressed for the winter assault they would soon face. "Have a great day at school, kids," Carol said and kissed them each in turn. "Bye, Mom," Robin and Randy called at the same time as they whisked out the door. Mike just wiped the kiss off his cheek, smiled, and ducked out the door before Carol could kiss him one more time.]

Carol turned to admire the tree once again and went to the kitchen. After the dishes were done, she sat down at the table and sipped her coffee. "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" was playing softly on the cassette. Carol agreed with Judy Garland that she would have a merry little Christmas this year.

The song came to an end and Carol thought about growing up and the different holidays she had spent with her mom, dad, and two sisters. Christmas was usually a happy time then, although it was a pretend sort of happiness. Even as a small child, she could remember not wanting Christmas to end. Not because of the toys she would miss, but because the pretending would stop and life would continue as usual.

Carol thought about her mother. She thought bitter thoughts about what she had endured from her mother. Carol was always being told that she was ugly, stupid, and that it was wished that she had never been born. Yet Carol loved the conveyor of these hurt-as-hard-as-fists words.

Janice, Carol's mom, was one of those people who aren't happy unless they have something to complain about. And if there's nothing to complain about, she would make a situation turn out so she would have something to complain about. She did just that the previous August during her grandaughter's birthday.

Carol's bitterness grew inside her as she relived that day in her mind. Carol's parents drove in from out of town for Robin's birthday. Carol's neck muscles tensed as soon as Janice was inside the house. "Why did you have the party early?" she began without saying hello. Jim introduced the rest of their guests to Janice and Carl. Janice bristled as soon as she was introduced to Lisa. Carol couldn't catch the first words Janice muttered, but she certainly heard the last—nigger. Carol was furious and embarrassed to think that Lisa had heard such a brutally cruel phrase

come out of her mother's mouth. Apparently Lisa was unaware of the remark.

Carol took her mother under her arm and marched her into the kitchen. "Who do you think you are coming into my house and insulting my friends? I have taken alot of crap from you for a long time and never bothered to fight because I knew it would be a losing battle, but if you can't act respectfully in my home, you're not welcome here."

Then the tears came. Janice could turn on the tears as fast as the kids could turn the t.v. channel. This infuriated Carol even more.

"I didn't do anything!" Janice lied. She was a very poor liar. "You're always so cruel to me," Janice whined.

Janice walked into the playroom. "Robin, honey, you know I love you and Randy and Mike, but your mother is treating me so terribly that I have to leave right away," she said. "That's enough," said Carol. "I want you out of my house now."

After spewing several obscenities at Jim, Janice stormed out the door. Carl followed right behind not uttering a word. That was just like Carol's father, he never stood up to Janice. Not many people did.

Several days after the birthday party, Carol received a letter from her mother. Janice told Carol that she didn't have a daughter named Carol anymore, although she would make sure that she would be able to see her grandchildren, no matter what.

Carol was angry and relieved to get the letter. Everything that happened in life was always someone else's fault, not Janice's. At least Carol would finally have some peace in her life.

The phone rang and startled Carol back to the present. "Carol, this is Darla, you'd better sit down." "Who died?" Carol answered back. "Mom died last night. She had a heart attack," Darla said.

Darla relayed the events. Carol sat stunned. She wasn't sad about the news but she wasn't over-joyed either. She just sat and felt nothing. It was as if she hadn't even met the woman Darla was talking about. They finished the conversation and after a long pause said their good-byes.

Carl had told Darla that Carol was not welcome at the funeral. Carol was relieved that she didn't have to make that decision herself.

Carol sat in the silence for awhile. The holiday didn't seem so cheerful after all. Carol sat and thought about the timing of Janice's death. "Your timing is perfect after all, Mom, you haven't lost your touch for making a bad situation worse."

That was three years ago. Carol's bitterness and grief have been eased by the medicine of time, but the Christmas holidays are still a little somber.

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44. Christmas

Josh Dipert

It is
at this joyous
time of the year that I
realize that I haven't one
true friend.

45. Haiku

Linda Flynn

Snowflakes cloud my sight.
Alone in this northern place,
I find a flower.

46. High Cue

Philip Antinori

For our time on earth,
all the world is a poem.
We are merely rhymes.

47. Christmas Toys

Roger Lonergan

The wind howled like a demon outside the windows of the old clapboard house, helping to drown out the sounds of the beating that was going on inside. Herbert Pinnick was in the middle of his holiday drunk and his children were catching the brunt of his anger. Herbert yelled and screamed, "This is the fifth time inna week I told you worthless bastiches to do the fucking dishes! Did you do'em? No! You sat on your lazy asses all damn day why I slaved makin' money to put food on the table."

Billy and Sally Mae sat huddled in the corner next to the old gas stove. Billy had taken the worst of the beating to protect his sister. He could feel the bruises start to form on his body and his side hurt, which probably meant a cracked rib. As he clutched his sister's mouth to keep his father from hearing her cries, he felt her tears mixing with the blood from her torn upper lip. In a vain attempt to block out his father's screaming Billy tried to think of his mother. Bernice Pinnick had died the previous spring in an automobile accident. Herbert had been driving drunk and blew a stop sign and hit another car. Since Berniece wasn't around to receive the beatings, Herbert started on the children. Billy thought of all the times his mother came to them in the night sobbing and covered with bruises. She would tell her children that Daddy was really a good man. She would tell them their father was just sick and that he would soon be well again. Slowly Billy began to hate his father. It was like a snowball that had been pushed down a hill. Gradually the hate grew. Soon the only thing that Billy's world consisted of was the hate for his father.

Billy did not feel his father's rough, calloused hands grab him and his sister. He was aware that they were being taken up to the attic, but he did not care. It was as if he was watching the whole scene from outside his body. The only thing that mattered to him was the hate for his father. It wasn't until his father shut the trap door to the attic that Billy snapped out of his stupor. Sally Mae was crying quietly in the corner. The attic was cold and dusty. The smells of mothballs and rat droppings wafted through the air. Billy held Sally Mae, more for her comfort than his. Feeling her shiver beneath him, he knew that he had to put aside his anger temporarily and find something to keep them warm lest they freeze. Looking around, he saw a large collection of their grandfather's things.

Billy started rummaging through the pile of things knowing that there had to be something there. Their grandfather had spent most of his life travelling the world as a merchant marine, and he had an impressive collection of curiosities from around the world. Underneath several trunks that were labeled from places like New Guinea, Haiti, and Cairo, Billy found a large stack of blankets. As he tried to slide the blankets out from under the trunks, a mouse which had taken up residence under the blankets darted out. Startled, Billy jumped back, knocking over the trunks. Billy stumbled back as a stack of books fell on top of him. Sally Mae ran over to see if Billy was okay.

"You alright Billy?"

"Of course," giving her a gentle shove "geez ya'd think I was a girl or something."

"I'm sorry," she sniffled.

Putting a comforting hand around her, he said "It's no big deal."

Bending down, he picked up a couple of the books that were laying on the floor. They were all big heavy volumes. They had titles like The Golden Bough, Magick in Theory and Practice, and The Crystal Tablet of Set. Sally Mae picked up one of the books and started leafing through it. "This one has a funny picture in it."

Reaching over, Billy took the book from his sister and began to look through it. It was full of odd diagrams and strange writing that Billy couldn't even decipher. Slowly the writing began to warp and change. It looked to Billy that the ink was crawling. Soon the text appeared to be written in English. The page he was looking at was the beginning of the chapter called "On the Magician and Vengeance". As Billy began to read the passages a slow smile began to spread across his face. Sally Mae wrapped herself tightly in one of the blankets and backed away from Billy into one of the corners of the room. She didn't know what it was, but Billy scared her. Billy read on.

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Downstairs, Herbert Pinnick was watching the Bronc and they were losing. Casually, he scratched his crotch and farted. Nothing like a good beer fart. Especially when it was Milwaukee's Best. He smiled. Damn kids thought they were smart. Well, the little bastards can't pull one over on me. Not Herbert Pinnick, no Siree Bob. First a good whoopin' and then the attic. That'll keep'em quiet. As he reached for another beer, he heard a loud scraping sound from the attic. Little fuckers better shut up. "You little fuckers better SHUT UP!" The noise stopped. God, I'm a great father.

****

Billy stopped moving the chests when his father yelled. He didn't see the need in aggravating his father before he was finished. The attic was bathed in the yellow light of an old Coleman lantern. Sally Mae was huddled in the corner swaddled in blankets. She watched her brother scurry about the attic collecting various items from her grandfather's chests and draw funny squiggles around the room. Finally her curiousity got the best of her.

"Watcha doin' Billy?"

He stared up from the circle he was drawing. I"m going to get help."

Looking at him confusedly she said, "How ya gonna call anyone without a phone?"

Stopping, he stood up and gave her an exasperated look. "This book'll send someone. It says so. Now stand back. I'm ready."

Sally was about to open her mouth when Billy opened the book and began to read aloud:

Lucifer, Belial, Asmodeus, Leviathen
I the enemy of the Hebrew God call
you forth. Satan, Dispater, Lord of Flies
My heart is black. Slay my foe. Take his soul to your black realm.

Come, I call you.

When Billy shut the book it sounded like a clap of thunder. Sally started to sob. The dust in the attic began to swirl. It spun faster and faster until Sally thought she was going to choke. She couldn't see Billy anymore, but she thought she could hear him laughing. Then the dust slowly began to come together in the center of the circle Billy had drawn. Slowly, it formed into a large creature. The thing's body was made of dust. It had a powerful body and large bat wings. Sally wanted to but she couldn't tear her eyes from it. Nothing. She could feel nothing. Paralyzed with fear, she could only sit and stare.

"I have been summoned by a CHILD! Speak quickly lest ye be thrown to the Fiends of Ghenna."

Billy didn't know what to do after a few seconds he stuttered "K..Ki..Kill my dad."

The demon seemed taken aback by this. **"That is all? Will you meet the price I ask?"**

"Sure. What is it?"

Laughing, the demon vanished in a large cloud of dust. Suddenly Billy felt very afraid.

****

The Broncs had lost, he was out of beer, and now there was more noise coming from the attic. Herbert Pinnick stood up and

started toward the stairs. Damn kids! I'm gonna learn'em not to make noise! As he started up the stairs, he heard a noise coming from the corner of the living room. Stuffed in a corner next to the radiator were some presents that the neighborhood church group had given the children for Christmas. It was well known throughout the community of Briar Cliff that Pinnick abused his children. Nobody wanted to believe it though. Good God-fearing Christians didn't do that. What little relief the community gave to the children was given in the form of a turkey at Thanksgiving, candy at Easter, and of course Christmas presents.

Staring wide-eyed, Herbert Pinnick watched as one of the packages began to rattle and shake. The package was being torn from the inside out. Long arms reached out and pulled out the body they were attached to. The Bunky the Clown doll that Sally Mae had gotten crawled out of its box. Its features were warped and twisted. The face no longer bore the usual happy clown face, but it had a maniacal grin that held thousands of needle-like teeth that dripped a viscous green liquid. He wanted to scream, he really did. Nothing would come out though. The only thing he could do was stand and stare. More toys began to burst out of the pleasant holiday wrappings and start to stalk towards him. The toy soldiers given to Billy by the McIntyre family took position behind the clown in an orderly, military fashion. Their stoic faces were replaced by the white bone of skeletons. *I ain't seein' this shit. How can I be seein' this? I ain't no fuckin' alky.*

By now the retinue of toys was joined by the zombie-like forms of Hunk Man and Power Woman. Herbert started to giggle. The skeleton soldiers knelt and took aim with their miniature rifles, took aim, and fired. Small red blotches stitched across his chest. They felt like dozens of tiny bee stings. Herbert Pinnick started to laugh. Hunk Man and Power Woman drew their swords and slashed his Achilles' Tendons. Falling to the ground, he roared with laughter. *This ain't happening I'm gonna wake up with one helluva hangover.*

It was the clown's turn. Bunky walked up to Herbert very casually. *Hey pal, want some Milwaukee's Best. It tastes like shit goin' down, but it feels great comin' out your asshole.* Tears blurred Herbert's vision as he laughed. To him, it looked as if the clown was opening its mouth to laugh. Then Herbert knew what was happening. The clown lunged at him. Trying to scream, he only gurgled as hot red blood poured from his open throat.

****

The two children sat huddled together in the attic. They heard their father laugh like mad, then he had stopped. Not sure of the time, they sat up in the cold silence of the attic for what seemed like hours.

"Is everything okay Billy?"

Unsure, Billy turned to look at his sister.

"Sure, why?"

"It's awfully quiet, that's all," she replied.

Before Billy could come up with a reply that would calm his sister, the wind started to blow the dust about the room. As before, the demon formed itself from the dust particles and stared at the children.

"It is done."

Sally Mae burrowed deeper into her blanket as if to hide from this monster. Billy managed the courage to speak. "What do you want?"

The demon stared at him in mild amusement.

"What is due me."

Quizzicly, Billy asked "What do you want?"

The demon only laughed in reply. Vanishing back into the dust from where it came, leaving the children alone in the attic puzzled. With a creak the door to the attic stairs opened. Billy and Sally Mae retreated to

the corner. At first, Billy thought maybe a large group of rats had managed to open the door and that they were heading up the stairs. Then the toys appeared. Billy and Sally Mae screamed. Then they stopped.

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48. HO HO HO

Sheryl Mastalesh

Jolly Old Saint Nicholas comes from an era long ago. But I wonder if he would have originated in the present day what he would be like.

He probably would be wearing a red jogging suit and running shoes. He might have a mustache but no beard and his long hair would be tied back in a tail. Of course he would color his hair and not leave it white. His round little belly would have been trimmed away from his workouts at the gym.

The sleigh and reindeer would be replaced by a red 4x4 and the reindeer would have been put out to pasture by the Animal Cruelty Society. Jingle Bells would include the lines that are being bellowed by the first graders today. "Jingle bells, Batman smells, Robin laid an egg." Ho, ho, ho would resound as Yo Dude, as he fills the tennies that foot the bill for the stockings.

Kids would probably leave a taco from the Bell or a Big Mac from Mac's for Santa as a treat. Of course, the Atheists would definitely want him called Santa instead of Saint Nicholas.

Instead of climbing down the chimneys, he would have a special automatic door opener that would allow him to enter houses. The toys that he would deliver would be the dolls of the present time that don't just say "Mama" but they roller blade, talk, walk, crawl, and have their own potties.

The toy trucks aren't just push models but remote and the lists of the children are so costly that Santa and the former Mrs.Claus who have divorced but are still business partners have had to resort to corporate funding and donations.

I still like the magic of the Saint Nicholas from long ago. And I hope that he is nice to me this Christmas.

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49. Permanence

Sean T. Clark

At 75 I see The Leaf fluttering in the wind.
It vibrates like those houses in the A-bomb testing films.
No, it flutters as a leaf wedged in a crevice of a wiper blade of a car traveling 75 mph would.
Nevertheless, to my amazement, it does not give.
At any second I expect it to break free—but it doesn't.
I begin to wonder "How could it become wedged there so firmly?" As if The Hand had placed The Leaf there by grand design.
I know I would have trouble holding on to a car going 75.
With each passing day, I return to my car and smile—The Leaf is still there.
Tattered, crumbling, disintigrating, The Leaf, its stem still firmly wedged, refuses to yield.
Hundreds of miles, inclement weather, the car wash, cannot dislodge The Leaf.
Just when I begin to believe The Leaf is inevitable, invincible, OMNIPOTENT, it is gone, as silently as it came.
This is when I realize The Leaf is just the leaf, just as the me is also The Me.

50. A Kite

Jim Goebel

to the sky.
high
fly
If I were a kite, I could

51. Falsity

Laura Maxwell

Fake flowers Won't die
Don't fade Can't bloom

52. Blossoms

Laurie Montgomery

Colors were vivid
Delicate vision
Violet, yellow and blue
A prism of perfection
Beauty I'd never before seen
I bent to smell their perfume
The fragrant inexistent
They were filled with artificial doom

53. Just Another Trust Fall

Kathy Franke

"Stand backward on this stump,"
she said and smiled, as I cringed,
"Then let go and fall! As you do
yell out `falling'." she finished

Another "trust fall;" supposedly
creating trust in our misfit group
"FALLING" I managed to choke out
around the fear in my throat

"CATCHING" chorused behind me
as I willed my body rigid and
landed in the arms of co-horts.
All laughed in relief and trust was born.

"FALLING" he must have screamed
as gravity claimed his body.
And the wind swirled around his body,
the only one to whisper, "CATCHING"

Trees replaced human arms
and another trust fall was completed.
"Do you trust me?" God asked
and all nodded as death bore eternal life.

54. Be Still

Mary Juricic

Be still - be still
and listen to me...

There was a time
when I knew not God.

It was a time when...
I could not sleep.
Discontent was my constant companion.
Pride and prejudice was my make-up.
Stress and anxiety clothed my nerves.
Greed my daily diet.
Fear the Goliath of my mind.
Anger filled my ventricles.
Jealousy my green-eyed monster.
Worry drained my energy.
Happiness was an illusion.

Then, a voice I heard;
"Be still - be still and listen to Me."

I listened, I heard
and now I'm free.

55. Judgement Day

Josh Dipert

My pastor looked at me today,
And asked what he could do.
I said, "I need some answers,
answers I need from you."

"When Judgement Day arrives,
whose standards will God use?
Will they be those of the Moslem creed,
or the Christian or the Jew?
Is majority rule always the right,
or one supported by few?
Yes, my preacher and my friend,
these are questions I ask of you."

"Why are you so silent?
Is there something I should do?
If not, then my preacher,
I shall continue."

"Tell me, is there a heaven?
Are those rumors true?
If so, will I meet you there?
If not, what should I do?
Am I doomed to Hell for sins,
Or will God forgive me too?
If not, will you tell me
Why He is forgiving you?

"Why are you so silent?
Is there something I can do?
If not, then my preacher,
I will continue."

"Did Jesus live and die for me,
or did He only die for you?
Do miracles really happen?
Please tell me that it's true.
If I find out they don't exist
I don't know what I'll do.
Convince me there's a Savior,
and His love is pure and true.
If you succeed in all of this
Then I can believe, like you."

At this he turned and walked away,
left me without reply.
So now I sit and ask myself
why he didn't even try.

56. We Meet Today In This Great Church

(Text for a hymn tune)

Martha Sayles

We meet today in this great church, to celebrate God's grace.
Good gifts to us so freely giv'n, let us respond in place.
Gifts of the heartland, rivers wide, all folk of evr'y race.
We give to you, Jehovah, our thanks, as stand we now in praise.

Jesus the Shepherd of our hearts, He will supply our needs,
let each one ask for Jesus' strength, to shoulder worldly deeds.
The beauty of this sacred place, gives voice for God's own Son.
Jesus, be thou our helper now, to see God's will be done.

Go forth in love to do good work, now let God's spirit lead.
A spirit nourished in this church, that all can say indeed
Past, present and the future church, will show to us the way,
We now go forth our hearts enriched, for life to be lived today.

57. Proverbs 10:12

Laurie Montgomery

We are different in what we perceive
We must be equal in what we believe
end prejudice

We cannot condemn one's color skin
We can take practice in religion
End Prejudice

Do not bellow in the ignorance of society
Use intelligence to maintain ethical propriety

END PREJUDICE

We are all different in what we perceive
We must be equal in what we believe
end prejudice

58. Sleep

Tim Eckert

I walk,
feeling lost in the night,
Looking for answers,
In the shadows that come to life,
I surrender,
To the spirit of dreams,
let him lead the way to my memories.

59. Nightmares

Janine Passehl

i didn't want to dream of you
you invaded my sleep
like a nightmarish monster
obscene laughter gurgling forth
from deep within your throat
mocking sweet sounds of
innocence and naivety

wake up

running faster in search of escape
feeling your stagnant breath
hot upon my neck
fangs scraping my flesh
unable to hold on

wake up
nowhere to run nowhere to hide
i turn to confront the beast
and surrender to that
which has invaded my sleep

never to awaken.

60. Whispers of Memory

Rhonda Muir

Linens laced with the scent of lavender
White goose-down comforter
and pillows - all white with
brief brushes of silken colours.

The scent of roses, long dead,
the memory of sounds heard
in what was joyful youth -
but now no more.

The soft coolness of silk and satin
trimmed in lace and ribbons.
The delight of whispering, light,
finger-touches of memory as they gently
beckon, invading my mind and taking
me back -
soon now,
I won't have to leave them anymore.

61. Surprises

Mary Frances Lund

a single red rose
a bouquet of mini-carnations
a poem hidden in my drawer
a card on my pillow
a note tucked in my coffee cup
a weekend at Jumers
cancer

SURPRISE!

62. Valentine's Day

Jim Goebel

i
sent
a
valentine
today
and
when
she
tore
it,
i
bled.

63. "R" Love

Kathy Franke

Ripples are formed in the Realm of our Relationship
and Reality's Rugged fingers
force a quake that separates us.
Righteous anger overwhelms Reason
causing Rancid words to Ring loudly.
pulses Race and Rage Radiates from her being
as i struggle to Right that wrong with words,
but Raw pain wells in her eyes
as she Reacts to my explanation.
Romance becomes degrading and Roses Rot
my Ruined attempts to Recapture what I destroyed
cause me to Retreat,
and Ruthlessly the Ripples never cease.

64. Words

Derek Shaw

They say that everything will be alright, but is it ever true?
How could anyone know what I went through?

Unless you were there, how can you comment?
For all you know, it could be a god sent.

They say that we have freedom, but who is ever free?
For death can come knocking, and take you or me.

They say that love conquers all, but it's always the country
With the most weapons who never takes the fall.

So words are nice to hear or say,
As long as you don't let them get in the way.

65. Happy Birthday

Kathy Jones

I came to you I offered you a gift - a token
Of our friendship
But I think you misunderstood
My intentions.
Happy Birthday, I said. I think
You heard
"I love you."
And it scared you.
It scared me, too...
Because I think you were right.
And it frightens me when I don't know
If I really meant it or not.
Maybe - deep down - there's a part
That still cares
About you and what you think
Of me
Of my gift
And of Happy Birthday.

66. The Taste of Words

Rhonda Muir

letters, s
ou
nd bles -> words
s, la
syl
la
bles -> words
Tumbling 'round in my mind -
like smooth, round pebbles
whose shape is given to them by
the tumbling of the waters in which they lie - or
jagged-edged rocks that were
ripped from their resting place by some chaotic
upheaval.

Words.
Songs.
Sentences.
Showcases for the tip of the tongue.
A powerful tool,
piercing, dividing, healing.
Giving life
OR
Bringing death
to the hearer—and to the speaker.
Words
s
ou a
nd r s
s h e
phrases.
I taste them,
I roll them 'round and 'round
on my tongue,
in my mouth,
in my mind,
in my heart.
I touch them - and use them.
Only to find that I have been touched.
Changed.
Forever.

67. Silent Discourse

Mary Frances Lund

Faithful friends—
You grieve with me, but my pain makes you uncomfortable.
You try to comfort but offer platitudes
and spiritual band-aids.
You search for words when none will come
and falter when you speak his name.

Say it loudly so I can hear.
Share your memories and
let me share mine.
Laugh with me when laughter beckons.
If tears fill your eyes, let them fall.
Offer a shoulder when I need to lean.
If I lean too much, prop me up.
Don't avoid me because you have no answers—
there are none, and I will learn to live
without them.
Tolerate my fury at grief's chaos.
Share my triumph when I take a small step alone.
Let me tell you how I loved him, and
remind me how he loved me.
Recognize that we were one
and that watching him die
was easier than living without him.
Hold my hand as I learn to trust again.

68. Rage

Josh Dipert

Occasionally
I run across something that frightens me,
a mysterious creature that seems to be violence itself,
which I have met and fought several times,
each time losing something dear to me.
I have seen his soul personified in his eyes, those
horrible black balls that are mere decoration
as he is blind.
Blind to the damage he leaves in his wake
he lashes out without caution, without thought,
and without motive,
acting only on his outdated instincts.
I know this beast well.
It is called My Self.

69. Anger's Release

Lynn Meredith

Angry green waves, black with low white caps wash back and forth like a washing machine. They are angry, out of control, killing green. They are lives-lost green, lives drowned, washed away, sucked down into the hatred and the fear, a whirlpool of disgust and pain. They speak of ancient ships lost, sails cracking, screams and terror of simple men. No one knew it would end like this. My

toes are not safe. I may fall overboard and be washed and drawn away into the morass, unable to breathe or scream out. No one would hear. It would be my own defeat, me alone and silent, knowing there's no use in fighting. Let it go. I need to let go, to stop clinging and clutching. I don't want to be eaten, devoured by creatures I can't see. The winds and waves are worse. It's no use....

The power of the sea gives me strength. I feel I can touch the frantic anger. I can strike out and whip around like the sea. I am the sea. I am the power of anger and hatred. I will storm. My gales pierce all around me. I destroy. I am God angry with the universe. I will rage, kill, and sweep all away, out of my way. I am power for power's sake.

I feel slowing winds....waves finding a rhythm to soothe me...green growing friendlier...the washing machine domesticating itself. I am rocking, back and forth, rolling up and down with the full, whole tide, round and continuous. I am one 3-D ball of Form with smooth sides and an inner core, moving as one constant, gradually filling and then subsiding entity. I hear the sighs of tides. All is relief, comforting and gentle. It is no longer the black and green froth of disjointed anger. It is now emerald green, no blue yet but beautiful in its descent. There are high rolls and no peaks, curves, and swells, rocking the child to an exhausted rest. I am stunned with the release. I am floating, unable to care. I feel only acceptance and release.

I move toward the silence of sleep, a true sleep that gives me the release I sought. I am no longer so tired. I don't feel the desperation of bed or drink. I've returned for the moment and can walk the shore looking for shells and wood, trace lines with my big toe, write my name and stomp it out. I could wait for the tide to erase whatever I say. I pick up clumps of wet sand and smear myself with them. Then I wash them off. Whatever I do can be redone - again and again. Nothing is permanent. No damage is so strong that the ocean can't wash it off. And I will remain. I will still be here. I'm on land now, not lost in the waves. I might even be able to go into the sea and be washed around without a feeling of panic. Then again, maybe not...

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70. Deer Journal III

Margaret Carroll Redmond

Where do the deer go in the day?
Often I have surprised upon them
At dusk, we have ridden as one of them,
The gray mare and I, but their
Day life only dusted wonder.

Today, I finally saw them
At high noon.
They marched across the pasture,
in broad daylight,
Like migratory Indians,
Carrying all their earthly
Belongings; a white tail,
A hunger for grass and
A propensity
To startle.

71. Of Football Games and Love

Lynn Meredith

In my memory softly muted edges, ringed with haze
from autumn fires,
The times were brightly colored like the teams.
Yellow Homecoming mums, powder puffs, decked
the bosoms of pompon girls rustling orange
plastic tinsel to pep band bleats.

Kicking leaves, holding hands down the streets
of a college town.
Strains of love, talks of Change and Life
Fringes of a moment impressed in splashes of color.

The pool this fall has turned once more, so soon.
Its full blue greened in the slanting light.
The air is harsher even in its warmth, taking
us forward, in real time.
Summer ends with football games and love
Brightly remembered.

72. Catch 22

Cheryl O'Brien

Life takes
too long
to live it.
Always too young
to do one thing
too old to do another.
Act your age!
Tell me,
how do people my age act?
Do you even know?
Do you even remember?

The workers of today
are paying for the
Social Security
of yesterday's workers
Where did the money go &
who's going to pay <u>my</u>
Social Security?
I'll grow old and have
a family
Just to hit a brick wall in
my memory later and never
remember my young life.

73. Christine Falling

Chris Savini

Sometimes she stares up at my window
I only wish she would go home
She sings to me about the night's events ahead
Tonight a'murdering she goes

She threw blood upon my window
And this time I hope it's hers
She rants to me about the joys of baby-killing
She begs for freedom from her curse

Now I'm writhing in my bed
Only to awake with her hand upon my head
I stare into her sunken eyes
The face of Christine falling

Christine falling
From my door I hear her calling to me
Christine falling
From my bed I hear her coming for me

And tonight I fear
God and His grace have gone and left me
And tonight I'll die
Beneath a pillow she crafted just for me

74. Somewhere Girl

Tony McFadden

Smooth beauty
ease over me,
interlock and intertwine
forever now your soul is mine,
my soul is yours,
we live as one,
loving life has just begun.

75. Outside

Chris Bernal

Faltering beauties
they cry
like egg-drop
sun beams through display glass

Cool fountainy youth
in morning's shade
still wet hair
tangling vines disturbed by laughter

wrought iron, and water
sculptures of the industrial artist
the unkown purveyor
of many comforts

overgrowth and concrete
drawing with words
like stub dull pencils
I doodle with diction
and insight

Blonde maidens
with coarse golden gardens
knowingly tease unknowingly
they prance under shame

Alone in the sun
waiting for someone to come
mesmerized by trees

76. Facade

Mary Frances Lund

"You're so resilient."
(would you rather I fall apart?)

"I could never be that strong."
(appearances can be deceiving)

"You look so good!"
(how <u>should</u> I look?)

If I were fragile,
unable to function,
dressed in sackcloth and ashes,

would you feel more comfortable?
would you let me cry?

77. Plastic Offerings

Mary Frances Lund

Don't say
"If you need anything, call"—
I'm not made that way.

Don't ask
"How are you?"
if you don't want to know.

Don't say
"I know how you feel."
Chances are, you don't.

Don't try
to rob me of my grief.
It
tells
me
I'm
alive.

78. Trespass

Janine Passehl

you may enter, but only
at your own risk.
slowly and with
trepidation.
cautiously, careful not to
disturb the stillness.
the windowless black walls are
bare save for hanging
tapestries of heavy brocade
covered in dust
while the corners are
strewn with cobwebs -
predatory creatures
ensnaring all innocence that
dare come too near.
take care where you step,
the floor is carpeted with
long-stemmed roses whose
thorns cut like
broken glass.

above all else, do not
close the door
or risk an eternity locked in this
empty room of
my heart.

79. Untitled

Janine Passehl

Chasing these
Haunting images which
Render me helpless
I embrace the
Soul of
The
One
who can inspire
Passion and Hope
in this
Endless cycle of
Regrets.

80. My Golden Retriever was a Werewolf

Shellie Smith

I was standing in the garden, watering my kohlrabi patch when my dog trotted up with a bone bigger and longer than any I had seen in my life clamped in his jaws. He's big, even for a golden retriever, and his jaws have quite a grip. "Amadeus," I hollered over to him, "don't you go and tear up our yard. Barbara will kill you." My wife wouldn't of course, but she would yell so much that the resulting headache I'd get just might do me in. Luckily, Amadeus knows better. He continued across our yard to the back field wagging his tail all the way. The back field is his territory and anything he wants, or needs, to do, he can do back there.

Amadeus held that strange bone tight the whole time he worked at the ground digging a hole around for it. With big paws flying, he excavated his way down through grass roots and soil. It wasn't long before he refilled his pit and sauntered up to me with his tail still in motion and his tongue lolling out the side of his mouth. By this time I was sitting on the back porch.

"You should take out a safe-deposit box at the bank and save yourself the trouble," I told him, but he wasn't interested in investment advice. He wanted his ears to be scratched, and he wasn't going to take his head off my lap until he got petted.

Later that evening, I stood in the kitchen looking out across the yard to where Amadeus hid that bone. What kind of bone was it that could be so big and from what animal? I decided to find out.

I wrapped the steak bone from dinner in tin foil and put it in my jacket pocket, then I got the big flashlight out of the pantry. Curiosity is a marvelous thing in its capacity for being contagious. First I caught it, then it spread to my wife.

"Roy, what are you doing?" Barbara had come into the kitchen from behind. Amadeus had followed her. I listened to his nails clicking across the kitchen's linoleum floor.

"I'm just going to check the rat traps around the shed, then head over to Jim's for awhile."

"Okay," she agreed with a smirk. Wrinkles bunched up around her brown eyes and the corners of her fine mouth as she brushed strands of greyed hair out of her face. She knew I was just tinkering around with something as an excuse to get out of the house before going off to drink beer with a buddy.

Exhuming the bone only took a minute. The soil was loose as I picked through it with the little trowel Barbara uses for her flower beds. To be fair, or at least more chivalrous than a common thief, I unwrapped the steak bone and put it in the hole before I refilled it.

"I don't know what kind of critter it is," Jim confessed after a flurry of guesses and at least three beers.

"If you want to know about bones, go ask Gill. He's the mighty big game hunter around here. Or go to the bowling alley and dig up old Doc Barrington's bones and ask him."

Being the least offensive of the two choices given, I went and asked the Doc the next day, but to no avail. He couldn't identify the bone but gave me his assurance that it wasn't a person's, which was a relief. The paranoid idea that it could be part of some missing kid or murder case had been fluttering around in my mind since I first saw it.

At that point, I could have just flung that dirty bone in the river, but I didn't. The subject was no pressing matter, yet curiosity had enough of a grip on me for me to go over to Gill's house that evening. No one ever goes over to Gill's house of their own volition.

Gill is pretty arrogant. He tends to brag a lot and tell long-winded tales of his hunting triumphs and tragedies. People wonder how his wife can stand to live with him. I'm one of them.

Gill came to the door with a rumble, his black hair tousled, a slight paunch filling out the lumberjack red flannel he was wearing.

"Roy, how are ya!" he bellowed and pulled me in the house with a rough handshake, repeatedly slapping me on the shoulder.

"Good to see ya! Come on in. Have a seat." After several minutes of bustling around and fussing, he finally settled into a chair in the living room. It was his own, personal Laz-E-Boy throne, the center of his cabin castle. I perched on the end of his couch.

"What can I do ya for?" he asked, eyeing the burlap package. I handed it to him.

"I was wondering if you could tell me what kind of animal this belongs to, Gill." He studied the bone in earnest.

"Where'd you get it?" he asked.

"My dog, Amadeus, dragged it home the other day." At this, Gill started laughing.

"I thought you used that ol' retriever dog of yours to hunt ducks, Roy. Seems like he up and got tired of ducks. This here is a deer's leg bone." He continued to chuckle.

"A deer? You're sure."

"Sure I'm sure. I've boned, jointed, and skinned enough of them in my lifetime to know," he said. "There are more than enough woodlands near town to support deer. They tend to wander from the forest preserve from time to time. Your dog must've come across a carcass while tramping around in the woods. Don't look so serious! I doubt it's anything he'll get sick off of."

With my little mystery cleared, I resigned myself to listening to Gill's epics detailing his mastery of the wild. He had just finished the fourth tale and was heading into a fifth when I excused myself and headed home.

I would have forgotten the whole thing if Amadeus had not brought home another big bone like the first one. It was exactly like the first one, a duplicate, so I knew he didn't just return to the same carcass and retrieve another leg bone. Amadeus soon started bringing home more and more bones, all different kinds. Very often they were fresh, with reddish meat or hide still attached to them. It got to the point where I was calling the back field "the cemetery." I'll be darned if that dog didn't bring something home every week, practically every other day. I had gone to the library and photocopied all sorts of animal skeletons. I kept the photocopies in a green folder on my workbench in the garage and kept track of just what Amadeus' haul was. The skeleton pictures weren't much use, though, because if it was small enough, he'd drag the whole kill home. There was one twelve day span where he brought home ten cats, four rabbits, and even a squirrel.

I admit this was very strange, but Amadeus was a good dog. Other than the bones and such, I didn't notice anything else peculiar about him. He was still a friendly dog, quick to slobber on my hand and thump his tail on the carpet or dance around when I came home from work. So he was more of a hunting dog than I credited him for. Golden retrievers were bred for that sort of thing, weren't they? Barbara never knew about the graveyard, but she did notice that Amadeus was not eating very much of his dry dog food. She insisted we take him to the vet. The vet only gave him a brief check-up and suggested we try giving him canned dog food for a change. Then he charged us fifty dollars for the visit and reminded us to come back for his rabies vaccination in the fall. I told my wife not to worry too much, dogs tend to slim up in the summer and Amadeus might just be reacting to the hot weather.

Months later, I finally was made to truly realize exactly what I was dealing with. The cute puppy I had bought for Barbara's birthday was flat-out homicidal.

I kept reading the back columns of the local newspapers. Sure enough, there were times where Amadeus' corpses showed up. All the cats from certain neighborhoods had disappeared or been found mutilated and people were blaming it on a Satanic cult rumored to exist in the area. Out-of-state tourists kept coming across dead, decayed, partially eaten deer on their nature hikes through the forest preserves. And the cemetery, kept by Amadeus, kept plenty full.

Then one evening, Amadeus finally got busted. John Mansfield's widow, Florence, called screaming across the phone lines loud enough for me to hear her in the next room. Poor Barbara had answered the phone and was baffled.

"Here give it to me," I snapped, full of nervous dread. "Now what's wrong, Flo? Calm down!"

"The hell I will!" she shrieked hysterically. "That yellow mutt is yours! I know it is! It got my poodle! It killed Sashi, and I'm going to kill it right now! You tell Barb I'm going to blow its head off!" She was still howling as I slammed down the receiver. Barbara hovered in the background, worried.

"What's going on?" she demanded, but I didn't answer. I was running out the door and in my pick-up truck before she knew it. Racing to Florence's place, all I could think of was what a flighty old bat she was and how her temperment was not improving with age. To top it off, John Mansfield made the grand mistake of teaching his wife how to use a rifle, and I knew damn well that she could make good on her threat to blast Amadeus.

I got to Florence's and strode up to the white picket fence that edged her yard. What was left of her toy poodle was strewn across her lawn. What was left of Florence herself was sprawled across the front porch, the stairs, and the front walkway slicked and splattered with blood. She had been raked and shredded by what could be either teeth or claws. My stomach and body convulsed and I found myself getting sick in her lilac bush.

On shaky legs, I was able to make it back to my truck without passing out. I pulled my gun out from beneath the seat, not a rifle but a handgun, and loaded it with Winchester Silver-tips. The bullets are something you can buy right off the shelf in any respectable gun shop and made with real silver. I set to the task.

"Amadeus!" I called, then called again with more confidence, trying to sound natural. I let out a burst of short, sharp whistles. I crept around the back of the house and saw signs of digging. I continued to call, and just as I was going into the third yell, Amadeus rounded the corner of the back fence.

He stood looking at me, not showing any outward hostility or friendship. His muzzle and chest were rusty with drying blood. It seemed he didn't even recognize me. I called him over and eventually, slowly, stiffly he came. The gun's weight swung heavily in my loose right arm. I got a careful look at him without going too close to him. The old widow got one good shot in before going down, right through Amadeus' throat. There was no way that dog should be either standing, walking, or breathing. I was filled with hatred and rage that my own animal could have done this. That I could have let this animal live to kill so many others, and now, a person. God, what if he'd gone after Barbara?

With this last thought, I brought the gun up and started firing shots into the dog. Amadeus rushed me with a savage snarl and tried to leap, but I managed to nail his head with the last shot, causing him to stagger and slump to the ground with a whine, motionless.

Now, nearly six months later, things have returned back to what Barb and I accept as normal. The last bit of fuss with the authorities ended a long time ago and that cuss of a local tabloid seems to have forgotten we exist. I was settling down in bed, tired, a little sore from work, and fully ready to fall into a deep sleep when it occurred to me that Amadeus had sired at least half a dozen pups with Mike Adam's black Labrador two or three years ago.

81. Tank

Chris Savini

Little water world of my creation
Bubbles in my bedroom,
Fills the walls with waving luminescence.
Inside my children dance
Gracefully through a silent sea.

82. Personals

Cheryl O'Brien

"Herald News Personals Section."
"I'd like to place a Singles Ad," she replied.
"Ok. The ad is $7.50 per inch. We can fit about 20 words in that space," he told her.
"I want Single White Female seeks funloving, intelligent, sensitive man with a large..."
"Miss, we can't print that."
"Sorry, ok. How about SWF seeks funloving, intelligent, sensitive man whose bank account is as big as his..."
"Miss, we can't print that!"
"Well, if I can't have printed what I want, how am I going to find the man I want?"
"You can have my number."
"Oh my God! You are such a pig! I can't believe this. I have never been so insulted in all my life! You are a sick puppy!"
Click.

83. Continuing Adventures with the 986 SX

Jim Goebel

God bless my little 'puter
Make my system thrive.
Save it from system crashes,
Protect its small hard drive.

Let me insert a floppy
And load up Windows 3.
Help me to read instructions;
Install it carefully.

"Please insert a floppy,
Then press any key."
WHIRRR went its small hard drive,
Then BOOM it went on me.

Curses flow from my fingers,
Onto the board of keys.
"Work you doggone 'puter!
You must do as I please!"

I then found the manual;
Picked it up and read.
And not at all surprising,
This is what it said:

"If you installed the program;
Have done it properly,
You can get the upgrade
Absolutely free!*"

"But when done incorrectly,
Instructions misconstrued
For you, dear friend, we're saying
Quite frankly, you are screwed."

God curse my little 'puter,
Damn its every byte.
From now until forever,
With pen and pad I'll write

(*This offer is not valid
From sea to shining sea,
Nor any time before or after
Nineteen ninety-three.)

84.Inside the Mind of a Madman's Creation

Tony McFadden

Things are going to change and fortunately I'm going to be in the middle, not trapped but protected. It's what the holy call worship, I call it total understanding. What can only be obtained by the observer, the seer. To know is to see behind barriers, thick and thin. Explanation is worthless to those who can't see for themselves.

Remember the idea of freedom is false unless you believe you can do anything, anywhere, with knowledge danger is involved unless you understand your knowledge and use it for yourself; not selfishly, but for yourself. Without your self, without your thoughts, your own thoughts to control you, there is nothing. The why in every answer is there, but you must find it by observing...thus my quest goes on.

85. Couch

Bree Sayers

Smeared like a drunken tapestry
crayons melted on the
cushions
Mom would be so mad
(I'm too old for that).
She doesn't see that
our melted crayons
are
everywhere.

86. Unfinished Journey

Jennifer K. Stempien

Unfinished journey -
Hardly begun,
Still so far to go.
The ground, gives me no comfort.
The rain, smacks me roughly.
The wind, pushes me off course.
The sun, blinds me with brilliance.
Nature so against me.
Blurring my vision.
Distorting my view.
Increasing the danger.
Hurting me more.
Still so far to go.
Hardly begun,
Unfinished journey.

87. Observe at the Ocean's Edge

Jim Wias

Observe at the ocean's edge:
She whispers the answer in soothing flow.
Ancient shards—sea-born things,
cloaked in newborn foam,
(a shape and color never the same)
tossed ashore by indifferent tide.
Dredged from dark and summoned by chance,
their borrowed luster fades—
stolen by the cruelest force—
to reveal but dull pebbles.
Offering in meter, Recovery in rhythm
is the nature of Her agent.
Sentenced to amble on paths wild:
Half-content with this fleeting visit,
prodded by sea-long possibility
And always a stone's throw from our ocean.

88. Kaleidoscope

Rhonda Muir

Lives touch,
then separate,
in a dance that may never be repeated
in exactly the same way again.
Like the sparkling bits of glass
captured in a kaleidoscope -
One twist of the hand,
and all the tiny bits of glass
shift into a different pattern
of touching,
of separation,
of beauty.
Yet they are all still in the same
Kaleidoscope.

89. To Sleep Naked On Flannel Sheets

Lynn Meredith

To sleep naked
Amid flannel sheets
Billowy, feathery
Pillow-y, Willow-y
Caressed.

Lover accepting,
Coffin comfort
Lying dead
Touching.

90. Finally

Kathy Jones

I finally know the meaning of
"Madly in love" -
It's how you must feel
About me
After I gave you back
Your ring And told you
I couldn't
Marry you.

91. On Going Steady

Betsy Carina Zacate

If you really love me you would
wait and if I really love you
I wouldn't hesitate. But I'm sitting
still and you're ready to leave.
If love is persistent and patient,
then that's not what's between
you and me.

92. Drowning

Janine Passehl

the soft glow and
pale flicker of
scented candles
dance against the wall
like an
underwater dream and
i am drowning...

the water of the bath
bubbles forth
like visions of the
past and future.
i lower myself into the tub
porcelain as smooth as
your skin
the scalding hot water
bringing back memories of
passionate kisses
the liquid enfolding my flesh
the way your arms
did while
the bubbles tickle like
your breath in my ear...

relaxing, i doze,
losing myself in
the memories
awakening to find
the bubbles
have disappeared
(like you)
the water has
turned cold
(like you)
and is
twirling
swirling
whirling
spiraling down the drain
like all my
hopes and dreams
and
i am drowning.

93. In Love With Two

anonymous

What to do?
when you're in love with two.
One is old
and one is new.

I left the first
because he blew
me off, too
many times.

He began to
chew
away at my nerves
so I flew.

It's hard to
get over,
when you
get used to
being with someone
you've been true blue
to.

It's been two
months and, I
love someone new
If only he knew
he's still number two.

The man I refer to
as new
is everything I've
ever wanted
in a man

If I could ever
get over the first,
I'd gladly say "I do"
to number two.

94. My Lucky Day

Josh Dipert

As I am driving to the hospital to see my last living relative
before his cancer operation,
I hit a nail in the road.
This flattens my right-rear tire, forcing me to pull over.
When I pull over, I pull the trunk latch to open the trunk,
to get the spare tire.
As I get out of the car, I lock the door to prevent any one
from stealing it.
Coming around to the back of the car, I see that I pulled
the wrong lever.
Reaching into my pocket to retrieve my car keys, I find
they are not there, so I look on the ground to see if I
dropped them.
Discovering they are not there, I tug at the door handle,
turning on the light and showing the keys in the ignition
where I left them.
I slam my head against the window and it begins to rain,
first a drop at a time, then developing into a full-blown
tree-bending storm.
Standing in the rain next to my locked car with the
flat tire and the gas tank open, a car suddenly
pulls up and stops.
Thinking that I am saved, I openly greet the driver,
who greets me with a large revolver
and demands my wallet, watch, and ring.
As the thief drives off, he runs through a puddle,
splashing oily mud on me.
At this point a State Trooper pulls up in front of me,
first asking me what the problem is and then giving me a
ticket for loitering.
After he opens my car, he escorts me to the hospital,
where I am told by the girl at the registration desk that I am
at the wrong hospital, at which point I sign
myself into the psychiatric ward for observation.
OH JOY!

95. hiv, aids

Rhonda Muir

hiv, aids, cmv, chf,
medical alphabet soup,
these i know
    -but-
histoplasmosis?

how did you get it?
poultry droppings - an airborne fungus
        inhaled in your youth -
it lay in wait all these years.

now that you are weak
it takes advantage - and grows.
not in your lungs as would
be expected - but in your blood!

A CHICKEN SHIT DISEASE!

96. Dali

Bree Sayers

Elusive,
clocks
so surreal-melting,
time that trips
all those who
are standing.

97. Mystery Man

Sheryl Mastalesh

Where did he venture from? His new territory seems to be Louis Joliet's Pointe. He bears his belongings upon his back, except for what he stuffs under his bloated cap. He must have had a home once upon a time. He seldom speaks to anyone besides himself and when he does, people shy away. The sidewalk is his beat. I have seen him there so many times now that he has become a part of the decor like a wooden Indian in front of a store.

I wonder where he beds at night and how he keeps warm. Does the idea of four walls crush him with claustrophobia so that he escapes to the freedom of the outdoors with no set street number? He is like someone from out of the past and yet the plastic Pepsi liter that he carries links him to this generation.

98. Mojo

Chris Bernal

Big daddy dope dealer
fat worm in his
solitude
without a word
looking forward to the long sleep
lights fade
in the mechanical court
menacing flags
whip
must be ripped
crippled

99. A Moment Last Spring

Jim Wias

In the Crescent City, Dionysus will emerge,
Roused from pagan enclave by sober Christian clock.
A sleeping heathen spirit to consume a million incarnates—
Bleary-eyed nocturnals fueled by a god's decree;
One lives most when senses say least...
(Fused and mingled sound to move the night: music seethed from murky bars and burst from float-choked streets. Sometimes laughter would pierce the sensual din).
We waded—ankle-deep—through littered streets,
past serene hippies—empty smiles; spent balloons at their feet.
Then were engulfed by a bead-throwing throng,
eagerly incited by a care-free flash from ornate balconies above.
And where the streets grew dark amd decadence thrived,
we were pursued by a slinking, rail-thin "dancer" with money in her eyes.

100. Post-Oblivion

Joe Mendenhall

Ash filled sky
laying
after the great flash
Dust ruffled planet
torturing
remembrance of
humanity's supreme intellect.

101. Dutchmaster

Chris Savini

Smoke from his cigar
Brought tears to the young girl's eyes
As did the burn on her arm
From the same cigar

102. i

Jennifer K. Stempien

I am waiting for the night;
it hovers over me.
ii
The darkness encloses me
The shadows caress me
The stars sing to me
their songs of
Life and feeling
Death and apathy
iii
Their song is sweet
The melody falls at my feet
where it stays and dies.
But I heard it.

103. Tank

Chris Savini

Little water world of my creation
Bubbles in my bedroom,
Fills the walls with waving luminescence.
Inside my children dance
Gracefully through a silent sea.

104. March, 4 a.m.

jennifer K. Stempien

Why do I awake at this hour?
That groggy between-world time
When the moon is awake and its power
When the sun still slumbers?
The icy wind cuts through the blue-black cold
And sends my soul to Oblivion.
It's almost day and yet the night tries to
hold on to its dominion o'er the land.
Black to purple to blue
Slowly the light destroys darkness.
Peach to yellow to orange
The night yields to day.
The stars end their song, the clouds part,
The world awakens for yet
another day.

105. Spoon River Copycatted

Lynn Meredith

Cinderella Heartwell

I left my home in Ely, Iowa, to marry
a man, a doctor, older than myself, and mean.
Lonely I was and scared for
Fear of his displeasure with me.
I huddled near the hearth
when I heard his footsteps on the stoop.
The lash of his hand was quick and smart.
One terrible night his wrath mounted
- and the first blow was the last for me.
Down I went in a heap of ashes.

Alicia Whitfield

Good people, they called us, a fine old family
of Macon - little did they know
my grandfather and his father and his father's father
were all afflicted with a moral degeneracy,
a lust for the unspeakable that sunk them so low.
All's I know was no child of mine was ever safe
with one of them around.
That's how we got our money and that's how we lost
it, all without the town knowing a thing.

106. An Early Death

Chris Savini

The Young Ruffian fought his way up the stairs, through the human sea which was once a living room, and into the equally crowded kitchen. Two dreadfully pale figures rested their drunken heads on the table. The scent of beer and vomit hung heavy on their lips as they spoke to one another. Actually one was singing, more likely to the beer cans which littered the table than to his twin, while his counterpart spoke in incoherent sentences about how Archie Bunker was a double-fisted drinker. The Young Ruffian found it doubtful that the drug-induced denseness of their heads allowed the pale drunkards to understand each other. The Ruffian laughed to himself as he passed them.

"I would gladly join them if I had the brain-cells to spare," he said silently. He fought with the sliding glass door which led outside to the patio. Reluctantly the door opened and gave him passage out into the snow-filled December air.

He could hear the muffled sounds of Keamosabe finishing their cover of "Silly Girl" in the basement. He was out of breath and his lungs, sore from the stale recycled air of the basement, heaved painfully as the cold air rushed in. He forcibly tried to catch his breath; he longed to be back in the basement, dancing in that violent way that young ruffians danced. He hated calling it "moshing" and seldom did, but he could never think of anything else to call it. This brief internal drama was interrupted by the sound of a voice. In fact, it was several voices which had been there all along but hadn't been noticed up until that point.

He looked around and found a pretty young face looking back at him. He was thrilled to have caught such a pretty creature admiring him, but in truth she was watching the steam rising off his sweaty frame. The Young Ruffian took an awkward step forward. They were vaguely acquainted (they ran in the same circles) and could talk with one another without formally introducing themselves. She took a casual drag from her cigarette.

"Are you hoping for an early death?" he mused. But she didn't get it. He hated it when a good Smiths quote went to waste. She offered him a sip of her wine cooler.

"No, thank you. I'm driving tonight," he said. He was very happy with himself. Not only does she think I'm responsible, but she now also knows that I have a car, he thought to himself.

She liked this Young Ruffian. Her friends told her good things about him, and she found herself becoming increasingly attracted to him. Besides she was very lonely and desperate for someone to be with.

The Young Ruffian stood shivering as the Pretty Girl gave him the details of what she had walked in on upstairs earlier in the evening. But he wasn't paying attention to her words. He penetrated her skull with his eyes and stared into her soul (he could do this kind of thing, you know) and saw her innocence. She wasn't any older than seventeen, and as pretty as she was she had lived a sheltered life when it came to men. Her proverbial heart was pure and free from the bitterness of pain and age which ravaged the Young Ruffian's soul. He almost cried right there in front of her when he thought of his old and defeated soul which was hidden by the mask of youth. And as he watched her eyes grow wide with the climax of her story, he felt as though he were watching her from the edge of Heaven, the sky falling through her hair. And he was crying inside because he knew he would never be let in. He could never let himself have her; the thing that tore at his insides would kill her youth, just as it had devoured his.

The Young Ruffian smiled and told her how numb his hands had grown and that Keamosabe was playing his favorite song. With that he turned and once again fought with the sliding glass door until it opened. She stood silently shocked and disappointed, the snow clinging to her hair.

"Maybe I'll take up smoking," he said. And then he shut the door. "What she said, `I smoke because I'm hoping for an early death and I need to cling to something.'" Smiths

• •

107. May

Chris Savini

I need to be in this place of ease
Lost in the mass of grass and trees
So I can think, love, mate,
And succumb to sleep.

I long to be in this place of dreams,
These open wounds I have won't bleed
And I can cut, slash, and kick the world
Look back and smile without a word.

I think I'll mate with mother Earth
Plant my seed into her dirt.
My clones will sprout up everywhere,
With colored faces and painted hair.
We'll take the world for our own
Burn it down and then go home.
Our minds like water, pure and deep.
Maybe I'll just go to sleep.

108. Just Standing There

Steven Talbot

I don't know why you just stand there
looking at me
When you know how much I love you
how forgiving I can be

After all the roads we've traveled
bridges built with pathways yearned
Sailing oceans of emotions
as questing ships we've sojourned
Throughout afraid of trusting love
confused we misconstrue
But oh My Darling, of this we're sure
we both live I Love You

Our love has cut us as would a knife
being human we rebel
If our love can ever heal the hurt
then only time will tell
we wonder "How do you dare?"
Forgetting it's in the building of bridges
that we somehow learned to care

Harbored ships with sails all furled
ensue uncharted seas remain
While unfettering currents pull and tug
demanding no refrain
God's Sea of Love is vast
where uncertain waters flow
But oh My Love, if we drop anchor
then we'll never, ever know
The unknown roads yet traveled
may all abound with some despair
But trust our love will guide us
and that we're in His care
Our pathways with great defiles of space
we know not just how to start
Trust our love to build the archways
which begin, have root, within the heart

When you know how much I love you
how forgiving I can be
I don't know why you just stand there
looking at me
For you know I'll always love you
oh so tenderly

109. Elvis's Birthday!

Jim Goebel

(Shot of a shadowed figure standing in a doorway)
Voice over: You thought that there were no more holidays
Hollywood could exploit... You were wrong!
(Shot of the figure stepping out of the doorway, revealing his identity.
A young woman screams)
V.O.: Now, from the people that brought you the fear of Labor Day, the terror
of The Fourth of July, and the horror of Thanksgiving comes — Elvis's Birthday!
(Brief shot of an Elvis impersonator smashing his guitar on someone's head.
Several shots of young people in fear while voice over continues) V.O.: He's back from the dead, and he ain't nothin' but a hound dog. Elvis: (While he stands over a victim) Yeah, Baby. V.O.: He doesn't reside in the heartbreak hotel anymore, but in your worst nightmare.
Elvis: (Screaming at a victim-to-be cowering in the cormer of a shoe store)
I warned you not to step on the blue suede shoes!
Victim: YARRGGHHH!!!
(Several shots of Elvis about to finish off his victims while voice-over continues.)
V.O.: Elvis's Birthday. There ain't no grace in this Graceland. Rated R. Starts Friday, January 8 at a theater near you.

110. Kepick

Martha Sayles

The powerful winds caused branches to explode upon the forest floor. Darting directional streaks of lightning incised their bullet beams thru defenseless waiting branches.

111. Sunset Sirens

Lynn Meredith

I used to sit at sunset, suspended
Hanging in that pause before speaking
Filled with the moment.
Still, waiting time.
Light etching shadows behind
My trees, my fence row arbored, dried
Vines clustering, Sun's Home.

Now, sirens quibble the sunset hour
Fenced in, fenceless, sunset lock up,
My Joliet prison.

Dodging houses and housewives and cats
A long way off I see that glow, that hope
Past the popping paranoid yard lights
Artificially lightening the place,
I reach my heart to home
But it's not there.

CONTROVERSY

family

rituals

trust

God

blues

ethics

[redacted]

confessions

hate

BOOKS

Entertainment

evil

Hell

Experience

[redacted]

Seduction

JUSTICE

SILENCE

courage

Innocence

REALITY IS THE BEST FANTASY OF ALL.

SEX, DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

life.

RELATIONSHIPS

MUSIC

here's what inspires us.

Jealousy

ART

SEX

Mystery

ENTHUSIASM

ROMANCE

RESPECT

Dreams

CREATIVITY.

ROOTS

MEMORY

revenge

envy

scruples

fantasy

loneliness

WAR

Ego

Nature

TELEVISION

Emotions

Sad Hearts

[redacted]

lust

crime

EXTREMES

power

MAGIC

Opinions

CHANGE

spirit

VIOLENCE

SAVING THE PLANET

friendship

Misery

Being Dumped

escape

lies.

Childhood

grief

Earth.

FREEDOM

LOVE

PEACE.

pleasure

BETRAYAL

Nightmares

LOVE

DEATH

risks

LOVE

wordeater 83

Summer

flexibility

PASSION

J.P.

Wisdom

Honor

Moods

Reflections

secrets

anxiety